

SBSTTA 26 Highlights: Friday, 17 May 2024

The 26th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 26) had a busy day, holding two plenary sessions in the afternoon and evening to address conference room papers (CRPs) on: matters related to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES); scientific and technical needs to support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF); and the detection and identification of living modified organisms (LMOs).

The contact groups on marine and coastal biodiversity, and biodiversity and health, met in the morning.

Matters related to the Work Programme of IPBES

Chair Senka Barudanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina) introduced CBD/SBSTTA/26/CRP.1.

On a list of topics for requests by the Secretariat for IPBES assessments, delegates clarified that the Secretariat is to prepare information “in collaboration with relevant UN organizations, respecting their respective mandates,” following a proposal by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION. They further decided to include the topics: “biodiversity and pollution,” deleting references to chemicals and waste; and “rights-based approaches, including issues related to gender, to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources.”

Regarding a request to the Secretariat to continue its close cooperation with IPBES, BRAZIL requested, and delegates accepted, to refer to opportunities to make use of the deliverables for each of the four functions of the Platform “as appropriate.” Regarding the recommendation to the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16), delegates made minor amendments.

SBSTTA 26 approved the CRP, including the annexed schedule of IPBES assessments from 2024-2030, with minor amendments.

Scientific and Technical Needs to Support the Implementation of the GBF

Delegates considered CBD/SBSTTA/26/CRP.2. Chair Barudanović noted two bracketed paragraphs in the draft recommendation, clarifying that these will be considered by COP 16. SOUTH AFRICA, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC), and BRAZIL provided minor editorial amendments.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION suggested deleting, or moving to a preambular paragraph, a provision on the establishment of technical and scientific cooperation support centers and the global knowledge support service for biodiversity. CANADA and EGYPT proposed forwarding this matter to the Subsidiary Body on Implementation’s fourth meeting (SBI 4). The text was moved to the preambular part of the draft recommendation.

Regarding references to three SBSTTA 26 information documents ([CBD/SBSTTA/26/INF/15](#), [16/Rev.1](#), and [19](#)), on gaps in tools and guidance to support GBF implementation,

CANADA requested that these be translated into the six UN languages and suggested a footnote to stipulate that these documents would become addendums to those being considered at COP 16. BRAZIL, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, cautioned transforming documents that have not been considered by SBSTTA into COP pre-session documents, and requested an addendum noting that comments were given, and parties had different views on the documents, which was agreed.

Following interventions by ARGENTINA, CANADA, EGYPT, MEXICO, the NETHERLANDS, BRAZIL, INDIA, and the UK, delegates agreed that “most of the substantial guidance that has been developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is relevant and that there is a wealth of tools and guidance developed through other processes that also support the implementation of the GBF and potential to work with them to mainstream considerations from the GBF into their activities, and that access to the guidance, adequate financial resources, capacity building, development, and technical and scientific cooperation are needed for parties for implementation.”

Regarding a provision on areas of new work, CANADA asked to include a list of GBF targets with the most critical gaps, and to link each proposed topic to respective targets, opposed by many delegations who expressed concerns that this would take a long time. Delegates decided to delete a topic on equity and the human rights-based approach relating to biodiversity, following a request by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, who noted that other fora are better equipped to address it.

NEW ZEALAND and BRAZIL suggested, and following informal consultations delegates agreed, specifying that a topic on further work on sustainable biodiversity-based activities, products, and services should target those “that enhance biodiversity.”

On text inviting SBI 4 to consider the implications of the new topics, the DRC and CANADA suggested adding knowledge sharing, the clearing-house mechanism, and administrative and budgetary matters to the list of topics of work, which was approved. Alongside several others, the DRC queried the feasibility of directing SBI 4 to review such work, given it convenes next week. The Secretariat clarified that the topics of work already relate to the agenda for SBI 4.

SWEDEN emphasized the need to acknowledge the gaps in the work programmes of the Convention, proposing additional text, opposed by the DRC, who noted language is duplicative with earlier agreed provisions. Informal discussions led to language incorporating the acknowledgement of gaps, and the earlier divergence among party views on how to consider information documents for COP, in the same paragraph.

The DRC, opposed by AUSTRALIA, proposed to amend a request to the Secretariat to collaborate on the new work topics identified and prepare a note on the potential scope of such work, and suggested deleting “subject to the availability of resources.” The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, opposed by GERMANY, BELGIUM, and SWEDEN, noted this paragraph preempts COP 16 decisions and urged for its deletion. BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, the DRC, and COLOMBIA suggested it be moved to the draft decision. Following lengthy informal discussions, they compromised on removing this language from the SBSTTA

recommendation and adding it to the draft decision, with bracketed text, whereby draft tools or guidance are requested to be prepared in collaboration for those work areas for consideration by SBSTTA prior to COP 17, and on conducting a strategic review and analysis on the Convention's work programme in the context of the GBF, taking into account the work done until SBSTTA 26.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION suggested, and delegates agreed, to move a preambular provision recognizing that the identification of scientific needs to support the implementation of the GBF is an ongoing process and that several other processes are relevant to that end, to the draft recommendation to COP 16.

In the draft recommendation, delegates discussed a list of issues that COP 16 should "recognize." Discussions focused on: the need to update some programmes of work, proposed by the NETHERLANDS and bracketed by BRAZIL; the need for "financial resources, capacity building and development, technical and scientific cooperation, and technology transfer in particular for developing countries" for GBF implementation, proposed by ARGENTINA and the DRC, and supported by INDIA, CHILE, and BELGIUM; the need for "including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women and youth" in processes to mainstream the GBF through tools and guidance, as proposed by the DRC; and the role of regional and subregional technical and scientific cooperation support centers in GBF implementation, and whether this should be included in the draft recommendation, as raised by CANADA, BRAZIL, BELGIUM, the DRC, and COLOMBIA.

Regarding a provision on agreeing to advance future work, following lengthy discussions, delegates decided to include the list in brackets, also keeping the paragraph bracketed in its entirety.

Delegates bracketed parts of the request to the Secretariat on: future work subject to availability of funds; work with other competent international organizations, where appropriate and in accordance with their respective mandates; and the development of tools and guidance to address gaps, with some delegates requesting aligning the language with modifications made in the preambular paragraphs on the CRP, including deleting reference to information documents.

The CRP was approved with these amendments.

Detection and Identification of LMOs

Chair Barudanović introduced CBD/SBSTTA/26/CRP.3.

On preambular text, TOGO provided an amendment to recognize the particular challenges that detection and identification pose to developing countries, which was accepted. BRAZIL suggested deleting references to "unauthorized" LMOs, which EGYPT opposed, with the suggestion thereby bracketed. MOLDOVA and MALAWI, supported by EGYPT, suggested strengthening language to "recognizing" advances in new techniques for detection and identification "of LMOs." A request by BRAZIL to delete text recognizing the limited information available on the use of new techniques was opposed by GERMANY, and the text was bracketed.

Delegates agreed to reflect that the Training Manual on the Detection and Identification of LMOs will be updated in the future. They further agreed to invite parties "to share through the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) their experiences with new detection techniques, including detecting newly developed LMOs, those that contain stacked gene events, and experiences with developing certified reference materials."

On a provision urging parties and others to provide financial resources to laboratories, INDIA proposed to add a reference to sharing training materials and reference publications regarding the production of certified reference materials. Regarding an invitation to the Global Environment Facility to assist eligible parties with this, SWITZERLAND suggested urging parties to submit appropriate proposals.

Egypt, for the AFRICAN GROUP, proposed additional text requesting the Secretariat to: encourage technology developers to share detection and identification methods on the BCH; and explore the possibility to link and cross-reference the BCH with relevant industry databases. Both suggestions were bracketed.

CRP 3 was approved with these and other minor amendments.

Contact Group on Biodiversity and Health

The contact group, co-chaired by Jahidul Kabir (Bangladesh) and Barbara Engels (Germany), resumed discussions of the relevant non-paper, focusing on actions for mainstreaming biodiversity and health interlinkages into the implementation of the GBF.

On Target 6 (invasive alien species (IAS)), delegates agreed to promote and strengthen collaboration for enhancing prevention, control or eradication, and management of IAS to reduce and prevent disease emergence.

On Target 7 (pollution), opinions diverged regarding references to antimicrobials and antibiotics. Following informal consultations, delegates agreed on an action calling to "raise awareness of pollution risks and the negative impact of pollution from all sources on biodiversity and human health."

On Target 8 (climate change), delegates agreed that nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches can help mitigate, adapt, and improve resilience to climate change, which is detrimental to human health. In the respective action, they agreed to raise awareness of potential co-benefits of these approaches and consider integrating them into national instruments.

On Target 13 (biosafety and biotechnology), delegates included a reference to the role of traditional medicine practices and bracketed references to: use of digital sequence information; the work being done in accordance with applicable access and benefit-sharing instruments; and compliance.

Regarding Targets 14, 15, and 18 on mainstreaming, a suggested action on reforming incentives and subsidies harmful for the environment was bracketed. On Target 16 (consumption), delegates agreed to refer to sustainable lifestyles.

Contact Group on Marine and Coastal Biodiversity

Co-chaired by Gaute Voigt-Hanssen (Norway) and Erica Lucero (Argentina), the contact group addressed two non-papers, on the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity, and on the process for modifying and adding descriptions of ecologically and biologically significant areas (EBSAs).

On the first, delegates considered, and then bracketed, preambular text for the draft recommendation. Deliberations addressed whether to include specific references to past CBD decisions, UN resolutions, and IPBES.

On the EBSA process, divergent views were expressed regarding references to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. The text was bracketed.

Delegates addressed guidance on EBSAs, before agreeing to: a footnote detailing the information that is contained in the information-sharing mechanism; extend the term of the Informal Advisory Group on EBSAs; call for the "adoption" of the modalities identified for the EBSA process, subject to finalizing the modalities; and a review of the effectiveness of the modalities' implementation after 10 years. Discussion also addressed workshop modalities.

In the Breezeways

"We have entered the last mile, but it seems a very long one," a weary delegate noted, leaving the venue late at night following a busy penultimate day of negotiations. Despite holding two plenary sessions, in addition to two contact group sessions, delegates only managed limited progress, with many expressing concerns on the timely conclusion of the SBSTTA meeting.

"We are going nowhere at this pace," a seasoned delegate emphasized, after plenary managed to address three conference room papers in its two sessions, finally approving them just before midnight. "If these were the least controversial items in the agenda, what will happen when we address the more complex ones," one queried, reflecting the fact that the discussed agenda items were those that required no contact group discussions. Others held onto hope that progress in contact groups will allow swift adoption of the more complex items on Saturday — well aware that whatever isn't done here, must be done at COP.