

Summary of the Third Session of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on a Science-Policy Panel to Contribute Further to the Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste and to Prevent Pollution: 17-21 June 2024

Chemicals, waste, and pollution pose a grave—and growing—risk to human health and the environment. Scientists are still trying to fully grasp the extent and complexity of these threats. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), there are 6,000 industrial chemicals that account for more than 99% of the volume of chemicals used commercially, and other estimates tally over 350,000 chemicals and mixtures registered in government inventories. Production is set to double by 2030 from 2017 levels. The picture is less clear for waste owing to inconsistent and incomplete methodologies. There are gaps in scientific knowledge about the burden our bodies and ecosystems bear from chemicals and waste pollution.

During the (expected) final scheduled meeting of the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) on a Science-Policy Panel, delegates were expected to make significant progress in establishing the scientific foundations for better management of chemicals and waste. However, they were unable to reach consensus on the “foundational document” that would outline the basic structure of the science-policy panel.

The OEWG agreed to forward two conference room papers (CRPs) to a resumed session of the meeting, to be scheduled immediately before the intergovernmental meeting, during which ministers are expected to consider and adopt the foundational document for the panel and enable a rapid start to its work.

One CRP is a draft decision on recommendations to the governing body (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/CRP.3). It contains four annexes with draft rules of procedure; a draft process for determining the work programme, including prioritization; draft procedures for the preparation and clearance of the panel deliverables; and a draft conflict of interest (CoI) policy, as considered at OEWG 3. The second CRP is a draft decision on recommendations to the intergovernmental meeting, which contains, in its annex, the foundational document (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/CRP.4). The draft financial procedures will be forwarded to the next meeting as an information document.

During the meeting, a proposal was made for a joint panel Secretariat to be hosted by UNEP and the World Health Organization (WHO). This proposal caused discussions on institutional

arrangements to stall on the issue of the host of the panel’s Secretariat. Furthermore, discussions on the conflict of interest (CoI) policy included whether to reference WHO’s procedures. Many of the divisions that ultimately blocked consensus revolved around issues of tailoring the panel for the issues related to pollution from chemicals and waste, who would control its decisions, and who would it serve.

The third session of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on a Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution convened in Geneva, Switzerland, from 17-21 June 2024. Over 550 government delegates convened from 124 Member States and 54 observer organizations.

A Brief History of the Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution

Chemicals, waste, and pollution are permanent features of our daily lives, posing direct and indirect threats to the environment and human health. With this in mind, the fourth meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), held in March 2018, adopted a resolution calling on all stakeholders to strengthen the science-policy interface at all levels. It also requested the Secretariat to

In this Issue
A Brief History of the Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution. 1
OEWG 3 Report 2
Preparation of Proposals for the Establishment of a Science-Policy Panel 2
Recommendations to the UNEP Executive Director for the Preparation of the Intergovernmental Meeting to Establish the Science-Policy Panel 5
Closing Plenary 6
A Brief Analysis of OEWG 3 6
Upcoming Meetings 8
Glossary 8

prepare a report assessing options for strengthening the science-policy interface at the international level for the sound management of chemicals and waste.

At the resumed session of UNEA 5, held in February-March 2022, Member States adopted [UNEA resolution 5/8](#), which calls for establishing a new science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and the prevention of pollution.

As envisaged in this resolution, this panel could support countries' efforts to implement multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other relevant international instruments, promote the sound management of chemicals and waste, and address pollution, by providing policy-relevant scientific advice on issues. The panel could also further support relevant MEAs, other international instruments and intergovernmental bodies, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders in their work.

UNEA decided to convene an OEWG to prepare proposals for the establishment of the panel with the ambition of completing its work before the end of 2024. An intergovernmental meeting will then be held to consider the proposals generated by the OEWG.

OEWG 1-1: The first part of the first session convened on 6 October 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya, and virtually. Member States gave general statements and focused on organizational matters to kickstart the OEWG's work. Member States agreed that three OEWG meetings during 2023 and 2024 would suffice to complete its work in preparation for an intergovernmental meeting. They agreed to focus on the panel's scope and functions at OEWG 1-2.

OEWG 1-2: At the resumed first meeting (30 January – 3 February 2023, Bangkok, Thailand), delegates elected Gudi Alkemade (the Netherlands) as OEWG Chair. Delegates focused on the scope and functions of the panel. Capacity building attracted particular attention, which delegates ultimately agreed would be an additional function of the new panel. They also agreed on a list of the elements that will have to be developed to establish the panel, including rules of procedure, processes for adopting assessments, and institutional arrangements, among others. Delegates further agreed on a timeline for when each element will be discussed and on how intersessional work will proceed.

OEWG 2: The second meeting (9-15 December 2023, Nairobi, Kenya) advanced work, which was captured in six conference room papers on: institutional arrangements; operating principles; CoI; scope, objective, and functions; intersessional work; and the provisional agenda for OEWG 3.

OEWG 3 Report

On [Monday](#), OEWG Chair Gudi Alkemade opened the meeting, emphasizing the need for focused, constructive, and flexible discussions to finalize the proposals, based on which the intergovernmental meeting will consider the establishment of the science-policy panel (SPP).

Katrin Schneeberger, Director of the Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland, said establishing the SPP would be a key contribution to work under relevant conventions and frameworks. She stressed the need to draw from best existing practices and underscored that the proposal for a joint UNEP-WHO Secretariat brings many advantages.

Sheila Aggarwal-Khan, Director, Economy Division, UNEP, stressed the need for an inclusive, interdisciplinary approach that

considers various knowledge sources and addresses chemicals' full life cycle. She noted that a transformational panel should address social, economic, environmental, and health issues.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, WHO, highlighted the links between health, chemicals, waste, and pollution and the potential of the SPP to promote informed decision making. He emphasized the need for a multisectoral approach to reverse current trends and implement evidence-based solutions.

Election of Officers: Chair Alkemade recalled the composition of the OEWG Bureau, noting that Linda Kosgei (Kenya) was elected by a silence procedure during the intersessional period to replace Cyrus Mageria (Kenya) as Rapporteur.

Adoption of the Agenda and Other Organizational Matters: Delegates adopted the provisional agenda ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/1](#)), annotated provisional agenda ([Add.1](#)), and scenario note ([INF/1](#)).

Opening Statements: Regional groups and Major Groups provided their opening statements, signaling their priorities for the meeting. All the developing country groups stressed the need to finalize the capacity-building function to ensure the effective participation of experts and countries from the Global South in the panel's work. Several Member States, and some Major Groups, called for a "leaner" institutional structure, questioning the need for a policy committee. Major Groups presented a unified position, including on the need for a strong CoI policy.

Preparation of Proposals for the Establishment of a Science-Policy Panel

On [Monday](#), the OEWG established three contact groups to complete or advance work on the proposals for the establishment of a science-policy panel, based on the conference room papers (CRPs) prepared at OEWG 2 and drafts provided by the Secretariat. These met throughout the meeting, with reports to plenary on [Wednesday](#) and [Thursday](#).

On Friday, Chair Alkemade convened plenary to hear updates from the contact groups and propose a way forward. She suggested parties focus on finalizing the text on principles and institutional arrangements in the foundational document. She suggested two documents as an outcome of this meeting: a draft decision of the intergovernmental meeting to establish the panel, containing the foundational document as an annex; and a draft decision of recommendations to the governing body of the panel at its first session, containing all the other documents as annexes.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION and SAUDI ARABIA lamented the text is far from being finalized and called for an additional OEWG meeting. CAMEROON noted its flexibility in either finalizing work at this meeting or having one more OEWG meeting, adding that disagreements should not carry over to the intergovernmental meeting.

UNEP Executive Director Inger Anderson stressed delegates are not starting their work from scratch, even if some might have believed they were. She underscored that the OEWG does not have to decide on all aspects of the panel's functioning at this meeting and cited the issues that the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) governing bodies settled after the panels were established. She outlined her recommendations for a "slimmed down" foundational document, including drawing on the IPCC and IPBES practice and returning

to the UNEA resolution 5/8 text on operational principles. She noted that, while UNEP expects to continue serving as the panel's Secretariat, it would like to draw on the expertise of the WHO and other relevant UN agencies. She called on delegates to deliver on the mandate and finalize the OEWG's work by the end of the meeting.

Delegates thanked Executive Director Andersen for her inspirational words and proposals.

The EU, ANGOLA, SWITZERLAND, CAMEROON, KENYA, NORWAY, CANADA, GHANA, and MEXICO emphasized that, with a positive spirit, a successful result is within reach, urging the OEWG to continue work and make progress.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION noted that fundamental issues remain unresolved, expressing readiness to engage in intensive work, but expressing concerns over finishing work in the limited time remaining. He proposed developing modalities for a fourth session of the OEWG, suggesting that work needs to be completed by the end of 2024.

SAUDI ARABIA and IRAN highlighted their positive engagement in further discussions, adding that time is limited and urging clear modalities to be developed if agreement is not reached.

Chair Alkemade noted optimism in the room and encouraged delegates to continue work, bearing in mind the instructions provided by Executive Director Andersen.

Foundational Document: The foundational document ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/2](#)) sets out the scope, objective, and functions of the panel, as well as its operating principles, institutional arrangements, and evaluation mechanisms. This document was the necessary deliverable from this meeting to forward to the intergovernmental meeting. Discussions took place in a contact group, co-facilitated by Sofia Tingstorp (Sweden) and Judith Torres (Uruguay), which met throughout the week. On [Wednesday](#), [Thursday](#), and Friday informal groups convened to focus on operating principles and institutional arrangements.

The contact group reconvened on Friday to hear reports from the informal groups on institutional arrangements and operating principles. Co-Facilitator Miguel Ruiz (Colombia) reported that proposals were made on financial arrangements and on strategic partnerships, but one Member State objected and therefore both sections were bracketed in their entirety.

On operating principles, Facilitator Keima Gardiner (Trinidad and Tobago) reported good progress on several principles, but the group could not agree on the principle related to human rights and did not address the final two principles due to a lack of time. In a principle related to producing deliverables that includes that they are to be policy-relevant, scientifically robust, and, if appropriate, prevention focused, one Member State, supported by another, said their concerns were not reflected and asked to bracket the phrase "prevention focused." Many other countries reported that the Co-Facilitator tested for consensus on this phrase, and no objections were raised. The brackets were added. Delegates agreed to add the institutional arrangements and operating principles texts to the foundational document as negotiated in the informal group and to forward the document to plenary.

Noting the many areas of disagreement, the plenary agreed to forward the foundational document to the resumed meeting of the OEWG before the intergovernmental meeting.

Scope, objective, and functions: Delegates spent little time on the scope and objective, and instead focused on the capacity-building function. The group began deliberations with the two proposals from the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) and the African Region, and the EU. The two proposals differed in terms of their scope. The GRULAC/African Region proposal included technology transfer and financial provisions to support the sound chemicals and waste management. The EU proposal focused more on supporting the participation of experts. On [Monday](#), debate ensued when the RUSSIAN FEDERATION introduced a new proposal that broadly referred to capacity-building for all functions. After informal discussions on [Tuesday](#), a joint proposal, based on the two proposals from GRULAC and the African Region, and the EU, was tabled and accepted as a basis for negotiations. This proposal detailed how, among other aspects, capacity building would support individuals to increase governments' capacity to participate in the panel's work. The outstanding discussions related to whether to refer to gender-balanced or gender-responsive participation in capacity-building activities.

The combined proposal accepted as the basis for negotiations was included in the foundational document forwarded to the resumed OEWG meeting. There is disagreement remaining on whether capacity-building efforts should be gender-balanced or gender-responsive.

Operating principles: Discussions on operating principles took place in the contact group on [Monday](#), [Tuesday](#), and [Wednesday](#) and in informal consultations on [Thursday](#) and Friday.

The operating principles guiding the panel's work were discussed on Monday, Thursday, and Friday in a contact group co-facilitated by Sofia Tingstorp and Judith Torres, and in an informal setting, co-facilitated by Itsuko Kuroda (Japan) and Keima Gardiner.

Delegates agreed that the title should be "operating principles and approaches." Noting the instrument will be non-legally binding, they agreed that the panel "will" rather than "shall" be guided by a set of operating principles and approaches in carrying out its work.

Much of the work was to cluster and streamline the principles. On pollution prevention, the general view was not to refer to any of the Rio Principles, including the precautionary approach. Delegates discussed a principle on producing deliverables that are policy relevant without being policy prescriptive, and scientifically robust, unbiased, and accessible, and, if appropriate, prevention focused, while also addressing/highlighting social and economic impacts of policies. A delegate strongly opposed reference to "prevention focused," with many delegates insisting that the language had been previously agreed. There was no agreement. Further disagreements arose over the reference to socio-economic impacts of policies.

On human rights-related principles, delegates could not agree on whether to incorporate a human rights-based approach and recognize the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, the right to science, intergenerational equity, and the importance of informed participation.

In the informal group, delegates cleared much of the text. Delegates agreed that the panel should ensure credibility and legitimacy, including through peer review of its work. Language on being scientifically independent remained bracketed. They further agreed to a principle ensuring impartiality and transparency, removing references to potential CoI and scientific uncertainties.

A lengthy discussion took place around consensus in decision making, with delegates unable to reach agreement on whether consensus should be “ensured” or “found” in the panel’s decision-making process on matters of substance.

They agreed on taking an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach that incorporates a broad range of relevant disciplines, sources, including appropriate sectoral expertise, and forms of knowledge, including Indigenous knowledge.

Consensus could not be reached on a principle recognizing the technical knowledge and experience of workers, including informal workers, involved in the management of chemicals and waste and promoting a safe and healthy work environment, including on language around informal workers.

Following lengthy deliberations, delegates agreed to balance geographical, regional, and gender boundaries, promote inclusivity of participation, consider linguistic diversity, and integrate gender equality and equity in all relevant aspects of the panel’s work.

Delegates agreed that the panel should have the flexibility to respond to members’ needs, in particular needs of developing countries.

Following discussions with many suggested alternative proposals, delegates finally agreed on a principle incorporating the need to protect human health and the environment, with special attention to those that are vulnerable.

The operating principles were included in the foundational document that will be forwarded to the resumed OEWG meeting. Upon the insistence of one Member State, brackets were placed around the phrase “prevention focused.”

Institutional arrangements: Discussions on institutional arrangements occurred in the contact group on [Monday](#), [Tuesday](#), and [Wednesday](#) and in informal consultations on [Thursday](#), and Friday.

Plenary or Governing Body: Member States engaged in a lengthy debate about whether the plenary or the governing body should be the decision-making or governing body for the panel.

While there was a general understanding that governments would be the members of the governing body, no agreement was reached on the role of regional economic integration organizations (REIOs).

Delegates also could not reach agreement on the participation of observers and states that are not members of the panel. This disagreement included whether observers should have consultative status with the UN, whether they should demonstrate “relevance” to the panel’s work, and whether Indigenous Peoples should be explicitly referenced.

The informal group found some convergence on the functions of the governing body or plenary, although the text remains bracketed. These functions included adopting the work programme, accepting, adopting, or approving the panel’s scoping documents and deliverables, and more procedural responsibilities, such as electing officers and establishing subsidiary bodies.

Bureau: There was a general acceptance that the bureau would be comprised of two members from each of the five UN regional groups. A long-debated suggestion was to have an “extended bureau” that would include representatives of relevant MEAs and other bodies. In the informal group, this was ultimately removed.

There was a sharp division on whether the bureau should have a policy-advice function. One Member State insisted that it would not accept that the bureau would advise the plenary on policy,

or coordination between the panel and other relevant MEAs, intergovernmental instruments, and other science-policy bodies.

Committees and subsidiary bodies: To expedite negotiations, the informal group ultimately removed most references to subsidiary bodies, except the interdisciplinary expert committee (IEC). Membership was debated, particularly whether Major Groups could nominate five additional experts. While the group largely accepted scientific and technical expertise as a relevant background for IEC members, socio-economic and policy expertise was not agreed.

The functions of the IEC were mostly agreed upon. These include providing advice and coordinating the delivery of scientific, technical, and capacity-building aspects of the work programme, providing advice and assistance on technical and/or scientific communication matters, and developing a transparent peer review process.

Secretariat: This issue was mostly discussed in the informal group, although discussions on whether UNEP and WHO would jointly host the panel’s Secretariat were also raised in plenary after UNEP and WHO introduced a CRP detailing a proposal for a joint panel Secretariat.

On the panel’s Secretariat’s functions, delegates agreed that the panel’s Secretariat provides “technical services” rather than support; facilitates communication with “relevant, key” stakeholders; prepares the panel’s draft budget; and manages the trust fund, as guided by the governing body. Delegates further agreed that: mobilization of financial resources, including identifying donors, is a permanent function that does not require authorization by the governing body; the panel’s Secretariat may propose strategic partnerships “in consultation with the bureau”; and an additional paragraph should be added to reflect that future functions might be assigned to it by the governing body.

A lengthy debate ensued over the panel’s Secretariat’s hosting institution and location. One delegate suggested the location should be “based on proposals by Member States,” which was opposed by another. Views diverged on the proposal to specify that the panel’s Secretariat should have a single location, with several arguing that this could be determined later. The group considered the Facilitator’s proposal, that the panel, at its first session, secure the panel’s Secretariat services and be hosted in a single location, based on suggestions by Member States. One delegate insisted on reference to UNEP.

Financial arrangements: This section proved divisive in the informal group. Lengthy discussions took place on the trust fund, particularly on concerns that additional contributions could be earmarked for specific activities. Several countries suggested a paragraph allowing additional contributions for specific activities, consensually approved by the governing body, in addition to voluntary contributions that come without conditionalities and cannot be earmarked for specific activities. Several delegates voiced their discomfort with inviting additional contributions, with some highlighting there should be no possibility for earmarking. Others highlighted that funders’ internal procedures in certain circumstances require earmarking and these contributions will otherwise be unavailable for the panel.

Co-Facilitator Ruiz suggested deleting all paragraphs in the section except for the first one that states that the governing body will establish a trust fund to: be allocated by the governing body in an open and transparent manner; collect voluntary contributions to support the panel’s work; and be governed by financial rules and

procedures adopted by the governing body. Following one Member State's objection, the group engaged in lengthy discussions on which parts of the text should be kept or deleted. Ultimately, the group agreed to insert one bracket covering all paragraphs of this section.

Strategic partnerships: Co-Facilitator Ruiz proposed a streamlined text consisting of one sentence for the whole section, stating the governing body may decide to pursue formal strategic partnerships. With additions from delegates on potential partnerships, comprising: relevant MEAs; other international instruments and intergovernmental bodies; other relevant stakeholders; and reference to "guidance by procedures and processes set out in relevant documents," many countries supported the proposed text. One delegate objected to deleting the text that Member States had previously worked on would "throw away" progress in the negotiations. The entire section was bracketed.

Evaluation of the operational effectiveness and impact of the panel: On Monday and Thursday, the contact group discussed mechanisms for reviewing the panel's effectiveness and impact. Discussion centered on whether the panel itself should undertake the review or if an external assessment is preferable.

Work Programme and Deliverables: On [Monday](#), [Tuesday](#), and [Wednesday](#), the contact group, co-facilitated by Katerina Sebková (Czechia) and Moleboheng Juliet Petlane (Lesotho), worked on proposals related to determining the work programme ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/2/Add.3/Rev.1](#)) and draft procedures for preparing and clearing panel deliverables ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/2/Add.4](#)).

On the process for determining the work programme, the main sticking point was on whether governments only, including through MEAs and other international bodies, could submit proposals for the panel to consider, or if a wider group of stakeholders, including UN entities and observers could make such submissions.

On deliverables, Member States clarified the definition of several deliverables, including assessment and synthesis reports. Some were unclear on what guidelines would mean as a deliverable, while one Member State added deliverables such as training materials and workshops. They agreed to make the list indicative to provide flexibility for the governing body.

Member States also sought to provide flexibility in the processes for delivering these outputs, with one cautioning that the process must not bias the panel's work toward the production of global assessments.

This work will be forwarded to the resumed session of the OEWG as an annex to [UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/CRP.3](#).

Rules, Procedures, and Policies: This contact group, co-facilitated by Sam Adu-Kumi (Ghana) and Itsuko Kuroda, worked on the draft rules of procedure ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/2/Add.1](#)), and the draft CoI policy and disclosure form ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/2/Add.5](#)). It was initially mandated to, but did not discuss, the draft financial procedures. It met [Tuesday](#), [Wednesday](#), and [Thursday](#), focusing on the rules of procedure and CoI policy.

This work will be forwarded to the resumed session of the OEWG as an annex to [UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/CRP.3](#).

Rules of procedure: On [Tuesday](#), delegates discussed: definitions; membership and bureau engagement; session modalities; membership, operations, and election of members of subsidiary bodies, including stakeholder representation on the IEC; and conduct of business and decision making.

Views diverged on decision-making procedures for substantive and procedural matters. Several argued decisions on matters of substance should only be made by consensus, while others called for voting if all efforts to achieve consensus have been exhausted. Several sections were parked until progress was made in deliberations on the foundational document.

On [Wednesday](#), discussions continued based on an updated document prepared by the Secretariat. Delegates focused on, among others: the section's title; scope; definitions; and venue, dates, and notification of sessions, including extraordinary sessions.

During the closing plenary, at the request of the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, the OEWG agreed that the resumed OEWG would aim to finalize the foundational document and the rules of procedure before the intergovernmental meeting.

CoI Policy: On [Tuesday](#), delegates discussed the purpose and scope of the CoI policy, with many supporting a broad application, including all involved in the panel's work and applying it to the development of all panel deliverables. They further focused on the distinction between UN and other specialized agencies' staff, particularly differences in CoI policies that may exist for WHO staff. They further reflected on participants' various roles, responsibilities, and levels of authority and if the CoI policy should differentiate among these roles. Other issues included reflecting current professional, financial, or other interests or, in addition, previous ones, and the relevant timeline; and whether interests should be disclosed only if they are significant and relevant.

On [Wednesday](#), discussions focused on implementation procedures for identifying and managing CoI, and the review process before and after the appointment of bureau and IEC members as well as for members on other roles.

Recommendations to the UNEP Executive Director for the Preparation of the Intergovernmental Meeting to Establish the Science-Policy Panel

On [Monday](#), the OEWG established a contact group, co-facilitated by Toks Akinseye (UK) and Safiya Sawney (Grenada), to discuss the decisions related to proposals on the establishment of the panel to be considered by the intergovernmental meeting ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/3](#)) and proposals to give effect to arrangements to be considered by the intergovernmental meeting ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/4](#)).

The contact group met on [Monday](#), and there was extended debate about whether to invite the World Health Assembly and other non-environmental international organizations to consider the decision to establish the panel. Debate continued on the potential role of the WHO in jointly hosting the Secretariat with UNEP.

The proposal for a joint UNEP/WHO Secretariat emerged in plenary on [Wednesday](#), when UNEP and WHO introduced a CRP related to co-hosting the panel's Secretariat. On [Thursday](#), there was debate on Chair Alkemade's proposal to seek further information for consideration by the intergovernmental meeting. Many countries requested further time, although the EU, SWITZERLAND, NORWAY, CANADA, and THAILAND welcomed the proposal and supported consideration of the CRP. SWITZERLAND noted varied arrangements are possible, including for one main host providing the panel's Secretariat services, working in close cooperation with another organization. The EU supported requesting further information, saying, with many others, that it could not support a specific recommendation at this time.

SAUDI ARABIA, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, BAHRAIN, the STATE OF PALESTINE, IRAN, IRAQ, and PAKISTAN opposed the CRP and the collection of further information.

On Thursday evening, delegates agreed to remove references to the WHO and World Health Assembly after a Member State strongly objected to their inclusion.

In plenary on Friday, Chair Alkemade introduced a draft decision on recommendations to the governing body ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/CRP.3](#)), containing four annexes with draft rules of procedure; a draft process for determining the work programme, including prioritization; draft procedures for the preparation and clearance of the panel deliverables; and a draft CoI policy, as considered at this meeting. She also presented the draft decision on recommendations to the intergovernmental meeting, which contains, in its annex, the foundational document ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/CRP.4](#)).

On the way forward, she proposed annexing the CRPs to the meeting report and considering them at a preparatory meeting before the intergovernmental meeting, which would focus on finalizing the foundational document.

CHILE, with RUSSIAN FEDERATION and SAUDI ARABIA, noted that changes to the documents are necessary, with CHILE highlighting reference to an incorrect number of annexes in CRP.3. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said he could not agree with the Chair's suggestion, pointing to the lack of agreement in the foundational document and, supported by SAUDI ARABIA, requesting clarity on where and when the work of the OEWG would be continued. SAUDI ARABIA proposed a note in the meeting report clarifying that all provisions in the documents remain open for discussion and that the current state of the documents be retained without the Secretariat making editorial changes, except for correcting the number of annexes in the decision text.

The EU called for clarification on the state of discussions on the rules of procedure by adding brackets around elements that the contact group had "parked" during this meeting. After Chair Alkemade's response that the editorial suggestions will be reflected in the documents, informal discussions ensued on the way forward.

Following informal consultations, Chair Alkemade suggested that the session be suspended and resumed at a later date with a view to finalizing the foundational document and the rules of procedure, noting that the resumed session would be organized back-to-back with the intergovernmental meeting.

Closing Plenary

Rapporteur Linda Kosgei (Kenya) presented the meeting report (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/L.1), noting that it will be finalized to include Friday's deliberations and made available in all UN official languages.

Noting the decision to suspend the session, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION proposed formally adopting the report on the first day of the resumed session, emphasizing that more time is needed for delegates to read and study the report.

Following a proposal by CAMEROON, Chair Alkemade suggested provisionally adopting the report pending final adoption during the resumed session, which was accepted. The report was provisionally adopted. There were no closing statements because the venue had to close.

Chair Alkemade thanked all participants for their engagement and adjourned the meeting at 11:01 pm.

A Brief Analysis of OEWG 3

"There was a strange stillness." Rachel Carson in her seminal book *Silent Spring* wrote about declining bird populations, but the same observation held in Geneva as hope dwindled that negotiators would complete their task at this (supposedly) final meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on a Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution (OEWG). Delegates were expected to finish the OEWG's recommendations to design this new science-policy panel. In the end, they were unable to do so.

UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director Inger Andersen lowered the bar on the final day, urging agreement on the "essence" of the panel. Still, this bar was ultimately too high. As a result, a resumed session will convene back-to-back with the intergovernmental meeting that could, it is still hoped, adopt the recommendations and bring the panel to life.

This brief analysis traces two principal reasons why the negotiations largely stalled, which will remain relevant when negotiations resume. First, negotiators struggled most when tailoring the panel to the realities of chemicals and waste problems and their governance. Second, deep divisions emerged around issues determining who would shape the panel and who it would serve.

Fit for What Purpose

As Inger Andersen repeatedly stressed, delegates had existing templates to design this new panel. Governments established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 and, drawing on lessons learned, set up the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in 2012. Both have significantly strengthened the scientific knowledge base, raised public awareness, and informed policy options on climate change and biodiversity—two elements of the "triple planetary crisis." But on the third element—pollution—an obvious lacuna emerged.

The calls to use the existing models as a template have persisted since the OEWG process began. But these are different government delegates negotiating on different issues addressed by a uniquely fragmented global governance landscape. Despite webinars and other opportunities organized by the Secretariat, not everyone had sufficient knowledge about IPBES and the IPCC. Some quoted from IPBES reports, while others admitted limited understanding of science-policy panels because they interact only with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Many were frustrated that some negotiators seemed to "forget" that they were negotiating a non-legally binding document.

There were those at OEWG 3 trying to negotiate a science-policy panel improving on existing models and those working to create a novel structure, which directly fits the chemicals and waste sector. While one observer said, "IPBES operating principles could be cut and pasted, changing biodiversity references to chemicals," others disagreed. Tricky, although constructive, negotiations ensued.

The idea of precaution, for example, is especially relevant. New chemicals are regularly created, and novel waste streams emerge when new products reach their end of life, which makes dynamism the norm in this sector. However, delegates agreed to delete references to the precautionary approach because they disagreed, had varied interpretations, or worried including one Rio Principle could lead to the inclusion of others. Some delegates noted that a

“too strong” focus on precaution would sideline current issues and legacy chemical stockpiles. Saudi Arabia fought and succeeded in retaining brackets around “a prevention focused” panel.

Another “tweak” to existing models sparked debate: a joint panel Secretariat shared between UNEP and the World Health Organization (WHO). Pollution from chemicals and waste is as much of a health concern as an environmental one. The idea of strengthening links with the WHO, including through a shared panel Secretariat, simmered at OEWG 2. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus opened OEWG 3 by announcing that the idea had been further pursued. Delegates quickly asked to see this joint proposal, which received decidedly mixed reactions. Switzerland—who many expected to be a strong proponent because it would strengthen the case for a Geneva-based panel—suggested an option that involved close coordination rather than a fully shared panel Secretariat. Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, and others sharply rejected the idea. Many said they lacked the mandate to discuss the proposal at this meeting, yet it still caused considerable friction. While WHO’s involvement did not find universal support, UNEP is widely expected to provide secretariat services for the new panel, as Inger Andersen highlighted.

As the days ticked by, references were made to what was decided when the IPCC and IPBES were established and what decisions came later. While the IPCC largely grew organically, establishing formal structures over time, the IPBES establishment was based on a foundational document. Many details, like conflict of interest policies, were decided later. The task at OEWG 3 was to adopt such a “foundational document” that sets out the basics, like institutional arrangements, operating principles, and financial arrangements. A few delegates, however, felt this was not “clearly communicated at the start.” Indeed, until Wednesday, much time was spent on issues not essential for the panel’s establishment, from the conflict of interest policy to procedures related to the work programme. According to some delegates, this took too much time and distracted from their main task. “Time management did not reflect the meeting’s priorities,” noted one negotiator, with others stressing that a little bit more time for negotiating operating principles could have led to agreement on this section.

Even the foundational document contains sections that could be delayed until later. Strategic partnerships, for example, came to fruition several years after IPBES was established. Some institutional arrangements that were subject to the most contentious negotiations during the week, such as establishing the expert committees, can be finalized by the panel itself, as IPBES has done. In the final hours, negotiators attempted to pair back the document and deliver the bare minimum needed to establish the panel, leaving all other decisions for the governing body. With many paragraphs deleted in the last-minute rush, a shorter, simpler text was forwarded to the resumed session.

Fit for Whose Purpose

The building blocks contained in the foundational document set out “who decides” and “for who.” Both involve delineating the scope of the future panel’s membership, outreach, and overall work.

Since this is envisioned as an intergovernmental panel, first and foremost, governments are in control of making decisions for the panel. However, the role of regional economic integration organizations, specifically the EU, remains hotly debated, particularly on membership, voting rights and procedures. How

much control the intergovernmental panel would cede to other bodies, including the bureau, interdisciplinary expert committee (IEC), and the panel’s Secretariat remained at the heart of the debates over institutional arrangements.

The role of the bureau evolved considerably during OEWG 3. The idea of a policy committee, which most delegations were unsure of, largely shifted to the notion of an extended bureau. With representatives from MEAs and other international bodies, this extended bureau could inform decisions on work programme priorities to ensure policy relevance. Some welcomed the more explicit political function of the bureau. Not everyone believed that a “politicized” bureau should interfere with the scientific IEC. The IEC members would be nominated by governments, which some observers said was already politicizing their selection, noting some governments rejected social scientists as eligible experts.

Modalities for the participation of non-state actors in the IEC remain contentious. Some oppose such participation, urging for a clear state-led process. Others point to potential problems to distribute five seats in the IEC among the nine Major Groups. Straightening the lines of authority between governments, experts, and stakeholders remained elusive until the end of the meeting. This led to deleting what some thought were good ideas, such as considering Indigenous Peoples or youth advisory groups.

As with climate change and biodiversity, chemicals and waste pollution disproportionately affect some peoples and countries. To compound the challenge, significant global disparities exist in the ability to access databases and information and in carrying out research. For these reasons, the panel’s capacity-building function was expected to be hotly debated. Instead, it was relatively quickly and almost entirely agreed upon, enabled by informal discussions among the African Region, the Latin American and Caribbean Group, and the EU.

Negotiators started from the two competing proposals from OEWG 2. One is comprehensive, including the facilitation of technology transfer, while the other is more limited in scope, following the IPCC and IPBES examples. At OEWG 3, delegates largely agreed on a bridging proposal that aims to strengthen institutional capacity by building individuals’ capacity. Some were relieved that there was widespread support for the idea but wondered if it could address the more structural problems around data access and generation in developing countries.

Towards Establishing the [Name of the Panel]

Many were frustrated as the silence descended after participants were rapidly ushered out of the venue as it closed Friday night. After three OEWG meetings, governments could not adopt an 18-page document. Instead, they agreed to convene a resumed session, where they must try to finish their work. The Russian Federation insisted that the rules of procedure must be agreed upon before the panel meets after disagreements in the negotiations on the plastics treaty over whether the draft rules had been previously agreed upon. No one seemed entirely clear on the implications for the panel’s first meeting, with some suggesting it could still meet after the intergovernmental meeting, as originally foreseen.

Some still nurtured hope that the resumed OEWG would succeed. Since the next OEWG meeting will be scheduled to meet directly before the intergovernmental meeting, many hoped this could add pressure to deliver before ministers and other dignitaries arrive. When reconvening, delegates will focus their deliberations on the

foundational document and rules of procedure. Based on the lack of agreement observed in Geneva, the most contentious issues include agreeing on the scope of the panel, decision-making procedures, provision of secretariat services, and engagement of observers. While this is a science-policy panel, politics are still very much driving discussions because these choices will shape governments' role and control in the future panel.

To reach agreement, delegates will also need to overcome geopolitical tensions and address the slow pace of negotiations caused by what some considered to be "stalling tactics also apparent in other negotiation fora." These are indeed "interesting times." In the meeting's final hours, a former negotiator, now an observer, mediated among parties because some Western negotiators faced restrictions on speaking with Russian delegates.

After OEWG 3, delegates stand where Rachel Carson predicted long ago: where two roads diverge. One road ahead for negotiators may still be marred by craters too difficult to navigate. The other, less travelled, offers a chance to realize a scientific response and input commensurate to the risks posed by many forms of chemical and waste pollution. Which road governments choose to take remains to be seen.

Upcoming Meetings

Basel Convention OEWG 14: The 14th meeting of the Open-ended Working Group of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Certain Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal will consider issues deemed a high and medium priority in the work programme. These issues include recommendations to improve the Strategic Framework and the functioning of the prior informed consent procedure. **dates:** 25-28 June 2024 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **www:** basel.int

Global Stakeholder Dialogue on the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC) Implementation Programmes: Intended as a first discussion with all interested stakeholders, this meeting will consider how to collaborate on the development, design, and formulation of specific implementation programmes and to identify what steps and activities are needed during the intersessional period. **date:** 3 July 2024 **location:** virtual **www:** partnership.who.int/iomc/global-framework-on-chemicals

Montreal Protocol OEWG 46: The 46th meeting of the Open-ended Working Group of the Montreal Protocol will consider reports from the assessment panels and engage in preparatory work for the 36th Meeting of the Parties (MOP 36). **dates:** 8-12 July 2024 **location:** Montreal, Canada **www:** ozone.unep.org/meetings/46th-meeting-open-ended-working-group-parties

CRC 20: The Rotterdam Convention's Chemical Review Committee (CRC) will review 33 notifications of final regulatory action and four proposals for severely hazardous pesticide formulations for potential inclusion in the Rotterdam Convention. **dates:** 17-20 September 2023 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** pic.int

POPRC 20: The Stockholm Convention's Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC) will consider proposals to list polyhalogenated dibenzo-p-dioxins and dibenzofurans (PXDD/PXDF) in Annex C to the Convention, as well as review the draft risk management evaluation for chlorpyrifos. Among other issues, it will review information related to stockpiles, products, and articles in use and in wastes. **dates:** 23-27 September 2024 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** pops.int

Montreal Protocol MOP 36: The combined MOP 36 and thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Vienna Convention will discuss issues related to implementing the Convention and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. **dates:** 28 October - 1 November 2024 **location:** Bangkok, Thailand **www:** ozone.unep.org

Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development (IGF): The 20th AGM of the IGF will meet with the theme: Redefining Mining: Balancing the Need for Minerals with Protecting People and the Planet. **dates:** 18-20 November 2024 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **www:** igfmining.org/annual-general-meeting

Plastic Pollution Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) 5: The INC to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, will continue negotiations with a view to completing the treaty by the end of 2024. **date:** 25 November - 1 December 2024 **location:** Busan, Republic of Korea **www:** unep.org/inc-plastic-pollution

OEWG 3.2 and the Intergovernmental Meeting for a New Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution: The UNEP Executive Director will convene an intergovernmental meeting to establish the new SPP. **dates:** January 2025 (tentative) **location:** Bangkok, Thailand (tentative) **www:** unep.org/oewg-spp-chemicals-waste-pollution

For additional upcoming events, see sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

CoI	Conflict of Interest
CRP	Conference room paper
IEC	Interdisciplinary expert committee
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MEAs	Multilateral environmental agreements
OEWG	Open-ended Working Group
REIOs	Regional economic integration organizations
SPP	Science-Policy Panel
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WHO	World Health Organization