

Report of the IMoSEB European regional consultation

Introduction:

After the conference on Biodiversity, Science and Governance in 2005, an international consultation was launched to assess the need, scope and possible forms of an International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB). The consultation is an exploratory process, a broad, multidisciplinary consultation with numerous parties involved and a political and media audience. Its aim is to provide real added value, taking full account of what already exists.

The word “biodiversity” is used here in its broadest sense covering the totality of living things in interaction, including micro-organisms and the services rendered by ecosystems. Biodiversity is considered in connection with such major issues as poverty reduction, food security and clean water supply, economic growth, conflicts over resource use and appropriation, human, animal and plant health, energy and climate change.

The first consultations set guidelines for reflection on how to improve the interface between expertise and decision-making. The Executive Committee of the consultative process towards an IMoSEB, meeting in December 2006, wished to broaden and deepen the consultations by holding meetings on each continent.

The European regional consultation of the consultative process towards an IMoSEB was held on 26 to 28 April 2007 at the Natural History Museum of Geneva and International Environment House in Geneva.

This meeting was the third regional consultation meeting scheduled by the Executive Committee of the consultative process, the first having been held in January 2007 in Montreal, for North America and the second in March 2007 in Yaoundé, for Africa.

It was hoped that the Geneva meeting would develop in greater depth the Executive Committee’s proposals concerning needs, discuss the options, make practical proposals, widen the consultation, exchange ideas with the other ongoing initiatives and processes¹, bring in new participants², discuss the structure, governance of a possible IMoSEB and seek diplomatic and media support.

The European consultation therefore represents an additional step to gather feedback and propositions for the IMoSEB International Steering Committee (ISC). The ISC will reconvene by the end of 2007 and will give final recommendations that will be brought to the attention of governments and international bodies.

¹ In particular the “Postdam Initiative”, EU Advisory Mechanism for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Global Biodiversity Outlook 3, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up, International Panel on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources...

² In particular Business

The consultation meeting

The regional consultation was co-hosted by The World Conservation Union - IUCN, the secretariat of Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Swiss Biodiversity Forum and the Natural History Museum of Geneva. There were 45 participants from 17 countries including 16 countries of the European region, 11 representatives of regional and international organisations or NGOs and 2 from business. It was organised at the Natural History Museum of Geneva and International Environment House in Geneva with the support of the Institut Français de la Biodiversité (IFB), the Executive Secretariat of the consultative process towards an IMoSEB and the European Environmental Agency (EEA).

The meeting was chaired by Horst Korn, member of the Executive Committee of the consultative process towards an IMoSEB. The co-chair of the process, Michel Loreau and other members of the Executive Committee (Georgina Mace, Martha Chouchena-Rojas) also attended the meeting, as well as several ISC members

The first day was devoted to plenary session papers and discussions about:

biodiversity and sustainability in Europe;
science-policy interfaces for biodiversity in Europe;
views from “business”: Integrating biodiversity into corporate strategies;
what kind of knowledge for effective biodiversity policy?;
a report of the Leipzig meeting held in November 2006;
advancement of the consultative process (regional consultations and contributions).

On the second day, three parallel working group sessions were held. Working group one chaired by Andrew Stott further considered the needs to improve the knowledge-policy interface. Working group two, chaired by Peter Bridgewater, addressed possible structural options for an IMoSEB, and the third working group, chaired by Sylvia Martinez, focused on communication aspects. The final report was presented and broadly agreed in plenary on Saturday by the participants.

Main conclusions

Needs for an improved knowledge-policy interface

The participants emphasized that there will be a continuous need for improved understanding, development and evaluation of the knowledge-policy interface³ and feedback loops. They also stressed that when science is referred to, it should be authoritative and legitimized, and that natural, social as well as economic sciences have important roles.

The workshop considered the needs identified by the various preceding consultations and workshops, and proposed the following needs as a contribution to further consultations on IMoSEB (the list not being ordered by priority). Different users and stakeholders share similar needs for an improved knowledge-policy interface (see Table 1).

1. Independent, synthesized, comprehensive scientific information and advice from all relevant sources to support the work of international conventions and institutions, with a remit for biodiversity management, with particular emphasis on the CBD.

³ We use the phrase “knowledge-policy interface” to acknowledge that information and expertise relevant to policy must include all forms of knowledge.

2. Improved communication to aid understanding and application of scientific results on biodiversity by all relevant audiences.
3. Proactive scientific advice on emerging threats and issues associated with biodiversity change identified by the scientific community, or expressed by stakeholders, including economic and social dimensions.
4. Improved access and timeliness of peer-reviewed scientific results on biodiversity so that they can be more readily and more effectively used in decision-making.
5. Promotion of dialogue among diverse knowledge systems and understandings, perspectives and values regarding biodiversity, to help make policy decisions more effective and appropriate.
6. Increased ability at national, regional and global level, to predict the consequences of current actions affecting biodiversity, ecosystem services and how they affect human well-being, to explore alternative scenarios, and to evaluate the effectiveness of measures already taken.
7. Improved, better coordinated, more effective, more operational and timely monitoring and assessments of drivers, pressures, state, impacts and responses relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services, in particular through provision of scientific support to relevant initiatives.
8. Insights from the relevant sciences and other forms of knowledge to bear on local/national decisions on topical issues that affect biodiversity where those decisions have international consequences, and where the knowledge base is particularly weak or unconsolidated.
9. Identification of biodiversity research priorities and gaps implied by decision-makers' concerns at all levels, and promotion/diffusion of these to the scientific community and the science funding agencies.
10. Mobilization of scientific expertise for national and regional level capacity building.

Options for a new mechanism on scientific expertise:

Purpose:

Considering the advances made on the needs and their refinement, the participants considered all four options for an IMoSEB set out in the Executive Committee's "Needs and Options Document" and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each option (see table 2). The conclusion of this discussion was that none of the proposed options was satisfactory. Therefore, drawing on the most practical and advantageous components from each of these options, participants developed a possible structure for a new mechanism – a structure that would seek to build upon and support existing mechanisms, while also considering new structures to address perceived needs and gaps, avoiding duplication of already existing structures or processes.

Participants stressed the need for such mechanism to have the appropriate level of legitimacy and authority.

At the outset it was recognised (as described above) that there is a clear need to improve the knowledge-policy interface for biodiversity governance and its management by organizing input from the scientific and broader knowledge-base communities to agencies charged with biodiversity governance in a better and more effective way. A need also exists for better dialogue between the broader scientific community and biodiversity governance mechanisms.

Most participants agreed that any such mechanism should initially operate at the global level, while leaving open the possibility to include structures and processes of other levels in the future. Participants further agreed that any such mechanism's work should focus on CBD-related issues, but recognizing the importance and legitimacy

of the Biodiversity Liaison Group, should also be relevant to other biodiversity conventions and actors within the wider international biodiversity governance sphere.

Participants agreed that there should be a balance between assessments and advice/scientific expertise (targeted reports etc.). Particular focus should be given to providing inputs to the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO). Further, it should address the issues of status and trends of biodiversity and should provide means to motivate/reward scientists for taking part in the process. Outputs of the mechanism will also contribute to the broader environmental agenda, e.g. achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Structure:

The preferred option of most participants was some form of a network of networks.

To manage this meta-network structure, a governing board should be established as the primary management structure. This governing board should be supported by an advisory group, drawn widely from natural and social sciences and other representatives of knowledge holders. This advisory group should be regarded as a 'portal' to subsidiary networks.

The membership of the governing board should not exceed 15 members, consisting of the 5 chairs of subsidiary bodies of scientific advice to the biodiversity related conventions (reflecting the membership of the Biodiversity Liaison Group) and 5 key scientific community representatives. The latter 5 members should be proposed by the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the International Social Science Council (ISSC). As the chairs of the subsidiary advice bodies are representatives of intergovernmental bodies this ensures an intergovernmental element in the process.

These 10 members will also elect up to 5 at large representatives drawn from a slate provided by the advisory group. These additional members will be elected for fixed terms depending on their expertise and associated networks in relation to the work programme. The chair of this body will be elected by the members of the governing board.

The governing board would be supported by a small secretariat.

To give the mechanism full legitimacy and authority it should be mandated as early as possible, but its development should proceed expeditiously.

Functions:

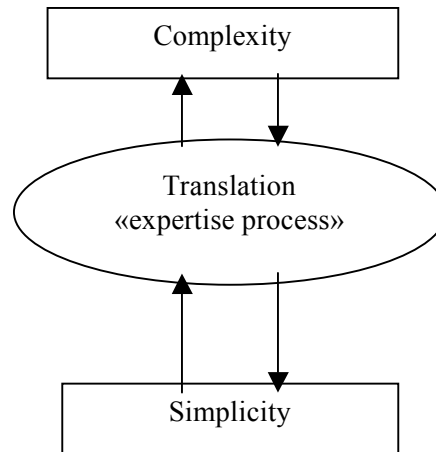
The mechanism would react to requests from the subsidiary bodies of scientific advice of biodiversity related conventions. However, the mechanism should also be able to address emerging issues regarding biodiversity proactively. The work of the mechanism should however broadly comprehend the work programmes of the biodiversity related conventions and the need for assessments/advice suggested by their programmes.

As the governance mechanism is drawn from intergovernmental processes and thus ultimately from national governments, this will enable the mechanism to reflect not only international but also regional, national and local needs.

Recommendations on communication: “Towards a communication strategy”

Participants discussed goals of communication, guiding principles, targeted audiences and different types of communication as well as ideas for specific actions. The need to be holistic in addressing complexity and cross sectoral issues, the multi-scale and cross-scale aspects requires an interdisciplinary approach.

The chart was drawn showing the “translation” of complex biodiversity issues into simpler, yet clearer messages. This was considered key to the communication process that should be depicted by the new mechanism bridging the knowledge and decision-making communities.



Participants stressed the importance of communicating the positive solutions and benefits of investments in biodiversity, as well as considering biodiversity in a larger picture of provision of ecosystem services. In particular, the group highlighted that an efficient communication strategy requires full engagement of professional communicators. Specific actions of different communication tools can also provide examples of good practice to be considered by the new mechanism. The group’s discussion is summarized in the following paragraphs.

Goals for communication

Make use of the best knowledge available including natural and social science to improve decision-making and strengthen implementation. The communication should include a two way process, a dialog to cope with complexity and listen to the needs of various decision makers.

Guiding principles

Biodiversity is a complex issue that needs to be communicated in a way that is easy to understand. Hence simplification is as much needed as addressing complexity (e.g. cross sectoral and cross-scale issues) and to allowing for a broad stakeholder engagement. A new mechanism should enable the identification of key facts and messages that could be communicated in a more effective way. The new mechanism should carry out independent assessments, synthesize the available knowledge on biodiversity, and translate it into the “language” of the targeted audiences. These audiences are very diverse and range from high-level decision makers up to practitioners and from the global to the local level. It should connect to networks in order to build upon different types of experts and expertise. Findings should be presented using scenarios as well as offering options for actions and assess possible consequences of the actions taken.

Communications should be pro-active, timely, relevant, authoritative, concise and short, consider appropriate scales, and emanate from a collaborative and interdisciplinary process. Scientific analysis and assessments should follow the commonly accepted scientific code and be characterized by

transparency and accountability. Communications should consider regional specificities whenever appropriate.

The group also discussed ideas for concrete actions regarding communication options (e.g. face to face exchange of scientists with policy makers, an annual World Biodiversity Forum modeled after the Davos meeting, a European scientific magazine on Biodiversity Management, a Biodiv-Wiki and a media strategy that includes communication experts), and considered the links to work on climate change as one way to improve communication on biodiversity. Providing sounds of alarm about the loss of biodiversity and associated risks should be combined with sending a positive message on the possible gains and benefits of investments in biodiversity conservation and wise management, to promote better and more sustainable delivery of and ecosystem services.

Continuation of the IMoSEB consultation

The European report will be sent to the whole ISC and spread through different networks.

The European recommendations will be presented at the next (European Platform on Biodiversity Research Strategy meeting (EPBRS, 4-9May, Leipzig) and at the L2L conference (Sustainable Neighbourhood – from Lisbon to Leipzig through Research conference in Leipzig- 8-10 May, Leipzig, Germany).

The progress of the consultation will be also presented during the EU Green-Week, (12-15 June, Brussels, Belgium)

A side event on the progress of the consultation will be held during SBSTTA 12 (2-7 July, Paris). All the results of the regional consultations will be sent first to the UNCBD Executive Secretariat and then to the CBD National Focal points.

Moreover, as the IMoSEB Executive Secretariat is also invited to participate to the CBD Ad Hoc Working Group on Review of Implementation, the participants proposed the European consultation report as an information document to the CBD Executive Secretariat.

In the next months, further consultations will be organized in Asia and South America with consideration to a possible Oceania consultation.

Final Conclusions

Reflecting on the two days and half of discussion, Horst Korn, chair of the European consultation meeting noted that the meeting had produced interesting outputs and develop a flexible, light and hybrid model, based on existing structures and that had real potential to make a difference.

Michel Loreau, IMoSEB Executive Committee co-chair noted the differences between the past consultations and declared that the proposal of the European consultation could become a concrete and workable proposal for the upcoming consultations. In closing, he stressed the importance of consensus within the biodiversity community to ensure the presentation of a strong, unified message to the public. He thanked the participants for their enthusiasm and attendance.

Table 1. Direct users or direct stakeholders / Needs

Needs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
High Political level	*	*	*	*	*					
Policy facilitators ⁴	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Managers	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*
Private sector	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Scientific community		*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*
Public		*	*	*	*					

⁴ Secretariats of Conventions, services from all kind of public institutions including governmental officials, consultants, IGO's, NGO's,

Table 2. Advantages / Disadvantages of the Executive Committee Options

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Advantages	The “relatively light, flexible structure”	Very explicit governmental involvement (although this disregards already existing intergovernmental structures)	The mechanism already exists, with high visibility.	It uses and builds on existing scientific networks; it does not duplicate, rather, it builds on existing gaps
Disadvantages	It has some potential, but as presented in the Needs and Options Document, is not well developed; who would it actually involve, where is the legitimizing environment?	Governance regarding biodiversity is distinct from that of climate change and involves a unique set of issues, as such, any mechanism must address the unique features of biodiversity (critically avoiding duplication of existing intergovernmental processes)	Simply adding a biodiversity component to the IPCC would not add value: biodiversity would still be considered from a climate change perspective only, when in fact there are many other angles; it would also continue to emphasize biodiversity as a lower priority than climate change – i.e. it would magnify this problem rather than solve it	It would consist of only scientists, such that it would lack links to policy makers; difficult to see what the “strength and governance” of DIVERSITAS, as mentioned in the Needs and Options Document, actually means here
Remarks			Alternative: it would be more desirable to have an International Panel on Environmental Change (IPEC), and this could be noted as a fifth, alternative option. Such an IPEC would not result in duplication as it would go much broader than the existing biodiversity convention structures	

List of participants

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Didier	Babin	France	IMoSEB Executive Secretariat
Gordana	Beltram	Slovenia	Ministry of the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy
Sylvie	Benard	France	LVMH
Lars	Berg	Sweden	National Scientific Council on Biodiversity
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Peter	Bridgewater	Switzerland	Ramsar Convention
Susan	Brown	Switzerland	WWF International
Marie	Chamay	Switzerland	International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development
Martha	Chouchena-Rojas	IUCN	IMoSEB Executive Committee
Sophie	Condé	France	European Environment Agency
Danielle	Decrouez	Switzerland	Museum of Natural History of the City of Geneva
Stéphanie	Guinard	France	IMoSEB Executive Secretariat
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Jerry	Harrison	UK	UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre
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Stefan	Leiner	Belgium	Directorate General Environment, European Commission
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Michel	Loreau	Canada	IMoSEB Executive Committee
Georgina	Mace	UK	IMoSEB Executive Committee
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