



15 May 2009

Biodiversity: Workshop on a Network of Knowledge on Biodiversity

Summary: On 6 May a workshop on ‘A Network of Knowledge on Biodiversity’ was held in Brussels. The purpose of the workshop was to bring together experts, existing networks and policymakers to explore ways of identifying, formulating and exchanging policy-relevant scientific knowledge on biodiversity. The results aim to inform two science-policy interfaces on biodiversity and ecosystem services currently under discussion: the European Mechanism and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) which would be similar to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Keywords: Biodiversity; Science-Policy Interface; IPBES; European Mechanism

Background

In 2005, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) demonstrated the important links between ecosystems, ecosystem services and human well-being to policymakers and civil society. The concept of ecosystem services entered the scientific and political discourse widely. Based on different MEA follow-up activities, a consortium of partners led by the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) and including the World Conservation Monitoring Center (UNEP-WCMC) and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) officially launched a MEA follow-up strategy in May 2008. The strategy aims, in particular, to explore the needs, options and modalities for a second global ecosystem assessment. The different partners recognised the importance of strengthening internationally the science-policy interface in any follow-up, to enable scientific knowledge to be translated into specific policy action at appropriate levels. Consequently, discussions about the development of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) were officially launched at an intergovernmental meeting on IPBES in November 2008¹. It merges the MEA follow-up process, which is placed under the umbrella of the IPBES, as well as the French initiated IMOSEB consultative process towards an International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity launched in Paris in January 2005.

At the same time, at European level, the European Environmental Agency (EEA) launched the EURECA² initiative. EURECA aims to be a European Ecosystem Assessment which covers the member countries of the EEA and compensate for the insufficient attention given to a European regional assessment in the first MEA. Subsequently, it was agreed to consider EURECA as a sub-global contribution to the follow-up process of the MEA. EURECA and the still unsure outcome of the international process on an intergovernmental platform has also fueled discussions on

a mechanism for Europe that improves access to scientific and timely information.

Brussels workshop on a Network of Knowledge on Biodiversity

On 6 May a workshop on 'A Network of Knowledge on Biodiversity – A contribution from Europe' was held in Brussels with the aim of informing both the IPBES and the discussion around a European Mechanism. The workshop was jointly organised by the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS) and BIOSTRAT, a specific support action funded under the EU Sixth Framework Programme to further develop the EU Biodiversity Research Strategy. The event was co-organised by the European Environmental Agency (EEA), the European Commission, the Flemish Community (Research Institute for Nature and Forest), the Institute of Landscape Ecology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Belgian Biodiversity Platform - Belgian Science Policy Office.

The purpose of the workshop was to bring together experts, existing networks and policymakers to explore ways of identifying, formulating and exchanging policy-relevant scientific knowledge on biodiversity. By using an interactive and participatory method, more than 80 participants consisting of representatives from different Ministries, representatives of DG Environment and DG Research, scientific networks and research institutes, were encouraged to discuss four relevant areas, which included:

- Assessing the current flow of information between science and policy,
- Identifying key principles, characteristics and functions that would allow knowledge to flow more effectively,
- Identifying the necessary operational structures and governance models, and
- Identifying how organisations could contribute to a network of knowledge.

The workshop also aimed to explore improvements to a concept note on a network of knowledge³ developed by EPBRS. The note's objective is to contribute to the discussions on a science-policy interface which brings together existing organisations with the purpose of assembling and communicating scientific knowledge adapted to the needs of policy-makers in the context of a European Mechanism and an Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), much like the existing and influential Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Next steps

The concept note will be revised in accordance with the insights gained at the workshop and made publicly available on the EPBRS website. A summary of the most important points will be made available to the Council Working Party on International Environmental Issues, to inform an IPBES related meeting to be convened by UNEP from 5 - 9 October 2009 in Nairobi. This meeting is planned to provide the first answers to essential questions on how such a platform might work, what the governance structure will look like, and who will contribute to it.

References

1. Documents submitted to the ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and

ecosystem services, held in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 10 to 12 November 2008. Note by Executive Director. UNEP/GC.25/INF/32,

<http://www.unep.org/gc/gc25/info-docs.asp>

2. The European Ecosystem Assessment (EURECA)
<http://eureca.ew.eea.europa.eu/index.html>
3. Concept note on a European Network of Knowledge on Biodiversity, EPBRS
February 2009
<http://www.epbrs.org/epbrs/event/show/24>

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