

# BELGIAN BIODIVERSITY PLATFORM

## MEETING RECORD



### TITLE OF THE MEETING

IPBES Assessment Review Workshop

### ORGANISOR OF THE MEETING

Belgian Focal Point for IPBES/ Belgian Biodiversity Platform (BBPF)

### DATE AND LOCATION OF THE MEETING

24<sup>th</sup> May 2017, Belgian Science Policy Office (Belspo), Brussels, Belgium

### ATTENDEES

Brendan Coolsaet (University of East Anglea), Catherine Debruyne (SPW), Luc De Meester (KULeuven), Hilde Eggermont (BBPF), Lucette Flandroy (FOD), Kelly Hertenberg (FOD), Peter Goethals (Ugent), Sander Jacobs (Inbo), Hans Keune (BBPF/INBO), Joost Salomez (LNE), Marie-Lucie Susini (Cebios), Erik Verheyen (KBIN)

### CHAIR AND REPORTER

Chair: Hilde Eggermont (BBPF)

### PURPOSE OF THE MEETING/AGENDA ITEMS

The purpose was to:

- Update on main progress of IPBES
- Provide background information on IPBES assessments and their review, and explain how to engage
- Discuss main features of a 'good'/useful assessment
- Collect first feedback on the Regional Assessments, and Land degradation and restoration assessment to feed the government review

### DISCUSSION POINTS

For details on each of the agenda points, see attached ppt ([BE IPBES Review WS.ppt](#))

### GENERAL ISSUES/POINTS OF CONCERNS RAISED BY PARTICIPANTS

#### ***Why are participants interested in this type of meeting?***

- Learn about this 'new' context, given relevance for other initiatives (e.g. Future Earth), policy/societal relevance of own research, research proposals etc.
- Learn to what extent such a global (intergovernmental) structure can have an impact on the local level (authorities)

- especially in developing countries
- Learn how IPBES is getting shape as a science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services
- Assess how elements of environmental justice are integrated in the assessment reports
- Share experience between assessment experts and other stakeholders (incl policy makers), also informing on the added-value to be engaged
- Assess to what extent IPBES assessments can be useful to day-to-day policy work. It was explained that IPBES is providing policy relevant options (not being policy prescriptive) – hence it is also not steering nor legally binding. It, however, has an impact on policy making (i.e. becomes a political reality) when key messages are also endorsed in the context of e.g. the Convention on Biological Diversity, as was the case for the two previous assessments (Pollination assessment; and Scenarios & Models assessment). This eventually led to national strategies; and knowledge gaps have been taken up by major funding schemes (cf. next BiodivERsA-Belmont forum joint call)
- Assess linkage with other IPBES functions (incl capacity building)

### ***“Transparency” of IPBES work***

Participants discussed the ‘transparency’ policy of IPBES – voicing serious concerns about the password protection/controlled access to the drafts. These types of hurdles (together with a website that is still not very user-friendly) will, for sure, limit the number of participants in the (government) review process. It would be much easier if drafts could be freely distributed within institutes and beyond. It was explained that such an approach was taken by IPBES to safeguard confidentiality – also resulting from the problems faced in the context of IPCC.

### ***“What is our role in the process; at which level (technical chapters and/or SPM) could we act?”***

Given that review of the Chapters and SPMs is a 3-phase and 2-phase process, respectively, and that the SPM will be discussed line-by-line in the next Plenary - participants wondered to what extent their efforts would still make ‘a difference’. The main concern was that an in-depth review, especially of the Chapters that count over 100’ pages, would be very time-consuming while maybe not considered after all. It was explained that the current review would still be very valuable to:

- highlight any specific gaps/biases in the knowledge. The latter could sneak in if there is an unbalanced expertise amongst the authors (natural vs social sciences; indigenous and local knowledge etc.), hence it was noted that information on author composition would be good to have as background information
- check ‘confidence levels’ of the key messages, based on your own knowledge
- assess the usefulness and relevance of policy recommendations (policy makers explained that they indeed use the recommendations to feed national policymaking)
- assess interlinkages between the Chapters, even if the authors of the assessments have also been involved in this process (e.g. authors of one specific chapter acting a reviewer of another chapter)
- add any missing references to scientific literature
- cross-check between Regional assessments, to assess comparability and usefulness for the Global Assessment.
- Improve the clarity of key messages. It was noted that this should not be considered as ‘textual/editorial’ comments.

It was also mentioned that in case of limited time, it would probably be best to restrict to the SPM and executive summaries of the Chapters, but refrain from digging into the technical details. Both the SPMs and Executive Summaries should give a good idea about the coverage and quality of knowledge – and if required, more details can always be traced back using the references. Finally, it was explained that, following the IPBES procedures, ALL comments will need to be looked at, dealt with and/or commented on by the authors. They cannot be ignored. A remark was made that the assessments are still ‘work in progress’; some references are still missing and text still holds placeholders (missing text).

### **“Confidence levels” of the key messages**

Participants felt that the information on how to interpret the confidence levels (cf. Appendix 1 in the Pollination assessment) should be given upfront in the RAs and LD-LR Assessment. Overall, participants agreed that the framework on the confidence levels was well-defined. It was also noted that the indications on the confidence level are not only relevant for policymakers, but also for research funding/research policy.

### **Quality difference between the various regional assessments, making comparison difficult & lowering usefulness for the Global Assessment**

Especially the African Assessment seems to be of (very) low quality lowering usefulness for policy makers and threatening credibility of IPBES’ work. Unclear what the reason is (language issue; lack of expertise;...?)

### **Policy relevance**

In order to make the SPMs useful for policy makers – key messages should be easy to understand, and tackling the different sectors (not agriculture only). Formulation should be very straightforward and content informative (simply stating that we are not reaching the goals is not very satisfying). Actions - especially positive ones - should be highlighted. Governance options should be well-explained. So far – all of this is not really the case; policy recommendations are rather weak in most assessments.

Use of bold sentences is – in many cases – misleading. Readers might think the bold sentence capture the main message, and un-bolded text is just an explanation/elaboration, but in many cases this is not the case (i.e. the regular text is also capturing important messages). Policy makers may miss out on these messages

### **“Nature’s Contribution to People”**

See:

- **Pascual et al 2017**. Valuing NCP – The IPBES Approach. Current Opinions in Environmental Sustainability 26: 7-16 (attached)
- **Opinion piece by Dr. Brendan Coolsaet**:
  - o NL/DeWereldMorgen: <http://www.dewereldmorgen.be/blog/brendancoolsaet/2017/05/22/een-nieuwe-wetenschappelijke-revolutie-voor-de-bescherming-van-de-biodiversiteit>
  - o FR/LeSoir: <http://plus.lesoir.be/95000/article/2017-05-22/face-lerosion-de-la-biodiversite-une-nouvelle-revolution-scientifique>

Participants raised concerns about 'yet another term' – but recognized that this new terminology is still useful to cover the different views on nature (Mother Earth perspectives > Ecosystem Services/monetary views > Human-well being/Nature-based solutions) that co-exist today. This new term is also easy to understand (self-explaining) and avoids possible 'bad' side-effects of monetary terms like ES. It seems a good compromise that also eases communication between communities (even regions) having a different type of relationship with nature. Irrespective of the usefulness of this new terminology, NCP should be explained upfront in the SPM as the term is still very new/not commonly known. Concerns were raised how this new terminology would impact on decisions previously taken in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity (where *Ecosystem Services* are commonly used).

#### **FIRST IMPRESSIONS/MAJOR POINTS OF CONCERN regarding the SPM of the ECA-assessment**

- SPM does not really present a coherent story. Some parts are rather exhaustive whether others lack sufficient detail to be useful for policy makers. Especially the sections on freshwater could be elaborated on (cf. Water Framework Directive)
- Sections on Marine/Terrestrial/Freshwater should be more coherent (e.g. pg 18); more parallels should be made between the different ecosystem types (e.g. habitat degradation is not mentioned for freshwater ecosystems, nor the impact of agriculture)
- Lack of historical data from before 1990s – especially in figure (e.g. SPM7, pg 20); shifting baseline not taken into account – hence trends look overly positive (bias)
- “Nature Conservation” deserves to be listed as a separate category in Table SPM2
- Table SPM2: In several places, stimulating biomass for bio-energy is mentioned as an option for good governance of NCP – but this is hard to understand from a nature conservation perspective?
- Table SPM2: Increasing crop and grassland yield and feed efficiency > the latter will need to be carefully defined, to allow for meaningful interpretation
- Figures could (should) be significantly improved to make them easy-to-interpret and insightful
- Confidence levels should be explained more upfront
- Would be useful to include a 'how to read' (kind of methods section) upfront – so that policymakers fully understand the purpose and set up of the SPM. However, such a section may also demotivate people from further reading...
- Very little reference to Nagoya protocol/genetic resources
- More focus on pressures from various sectors (beyond agriculture) is needed
- Quite a lot of generalization for West-Europe, despite existing inter-regional differences
- Quality difference between sections on West versus East-Europe (due to lack of information, or expertise?)
- Governance options should be well-explained
- Separate section on “knowledge gaps”, and maybe also on “Actions for IPBES” (as was also the case for the methodological assessment on scenarios & models) would be very useful to have. For example – the section on research needs could be taken up by research funding bodies.

***More detailed comments raised during the meeting will be integrated in the review template.***

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS/MAJOR POINTS OF CONCERN regarding the SPM of the Land Degradation and Restoration Assessment

- Very dense writing & phrasing, making it hard to read – hence, the SPM is not accessible to policymakers and misses out on its main objective. Wording should be worked on (this is not just an issue of textual editing)
- SPM does not really present a coherent story. Some parts are rather exhaustive whereas others lack sufficient detail to be useful for policy makers
- Overall, very little (nearly no!) references to UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification). Most of the attention goes to the Aichi targets and SDGs; this should be balanced!
- Some typos change the meaning of word, these could be corrected (e.g. B3.1. Food insecurity should probably be 'food security'?). Also, phrasing is often dense and/or incorrect > several sentences should be rephrased carefully
- Subtitles should be short and clear. *E.g. B: Land degradation: drivers, impacts and responses* > this section is not referring to management responses, hence wording is misleading
- Figures should be self-explaining/easy to interpret; colors should be clear
- Abbreviations (e.g. LDRA) and confidence levels should be explained upfront
- Use of definition (e.g. land degradation) should be coherent across the text
- Better showcasing of 'positive actions' is needed
- It should be specified throughout the text that 'terrestrial' also includes 'wetlands'
- Not enough focus on the restoration aspect (too much attention on land 'degradation')
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***More detailed comments raised during the meeting will be integrated in the review template.***

### Division of work amongst experts/ Follow-up on this WS

See excel table summarizing division of work amongst BE experts: [BE IPBES Review Division.xls](#)

As such, all assessments (at least the SPMs) will be covered, and coherency checked for.

### UPCOMING DEADLINE

- **Experts: please send your feedback (in any format you want, but preferably review template) to [h.eggermont@biodiversity.be](mailto:h.eggermont@biodiversity.be) by 12 June.** H. Eggermont will subsequently compile all comments received for all the assessments – and send it back to the experts, so that they can also submit individually to the respective Technical Support Units (for email addresses and guidelines, see the powerpoint ppt ([BE IPBES Review WS.ppt](#)) by the deadline – **26<sup>th</sup> June**. The expert feedback will also be used to draft the official (Belgian) government response
- **Government response to each of the assessments will be validated by the Steering Group Nature, Steering Group Biodiversity, extended with BBPf Steering Committee. Thereafter, government response will be submitted by the respective deadline**

END OF REPORT