

## **Fifth meeting of the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen**

9 – 10 January 2024

### **Background document for agenda item 6: Summary of the work by the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen and feedback.**

#### **Introductory note**

This draft document has been prepared to support discussions by focal points under agenda item 6 entitled “Summary of the work by the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen and feedback”.

The draft document will be finalized during the fifth meeting of the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen in preparation for the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly.

#### **Draft headlines – (Co-chair’s) Summary of the work of the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen**

*The present summary was prepared by the [Co-Chairs of] the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen. It details the work done by the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen in accordance with the mandates contained in United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions 4/14 and 5/2. The summary was finalized, in consultation with Focal Points, at the fifth meeting of the Working Group (9–10 January 2024) in the understanding that such consultations were not to be seen as formal negotiations.*

*A summary<sup>[X]</sup> setting out, among other things, potential options for continued work is made available for the consideration of Member States.*

#### **Introduction**

1. **The UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen was established pursuant to resolution 4/14 to follow up on the tasks set out in the resolution.** Following UNEA resolution 5/2 the scope of the Working Group was expanded to facilitate the implementation of both resolutions and strengthen the engagement and ownership of their implementation by Member States and stakeholders.
2. **On 30 August 2022, the Executive Director of UNEP invited Member States to nominate focal points and Co-Chairs to the Working Group.** The appointment of the two Co-Chairs, Ms. Purvaja Ramachandran, Director, National Center for Sustainable Coastal Management, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of India, and Mr. Mihai Constantinescu, Director of the Management Unit for the Integrated Nutrient Pollution Control, Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests of Romania, was coordinated by the Committee of Permanent Representatives under the leadership of the President of UNEA-6.
3. More than 75 focal points were nominated by Member States to the [Working Group](#). (*Expand on regional breakdown – Graph to be inserted in January*)
4. **The Working Group held five meetings.** The first meeting was held online on 8 to 9 June 2020 and established an ad hoc Task Team; the second meeting was held online on 17 January 2023 to resume the work of the Working Group, the third meeting was held in a hybrid format in Bucharest, Romania, on 27 April 2023, followed by an informal expert meeting on 28 April; the fourth meeting was held in a hybrid format in Nairobi, Kenya, on 28 September 2023, followed by an informal expert meeting on 29 September; and the fifth meeting on 9 to 10 January 2024, followed by an informal expert half day meeting on 10 January.
5. A dedicated webpage for the Working Group was created, enabling an easy access to the meetings documents.
6. **The Working Group focused its work on the following main areas:**

#### **Voluntary National Action Plans**

**The Working Group shared information on voluntary national action plans, as available, according to national circumstances.** Under the leadership of the Co-Chairs and based on the provisions in the Terms of Reference of the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen to “share information on national action plans, as available, according to national circumstances”, a baseline screening of existing actions and action plans was conducted towards the preparation of a voluntary national action plan. Thus, by the analysis of more than 20 received baseline screening documents, the findings and recommendations were processed for being included in a voluntary national action plan template with ten action areas which was further consulted and consolidated within the working group.

**Support Member States, at their request, in the development of national action plans for sustainable nitrogen management.** Since its second meeting, the Working Group has made significant progress on identifying action areas for the consideration of Member States on the development of national action plans for sustainable nitrogen management. Recognizing that Member States are at different stages of action plan development/implementation, UNEP invited Member States who wish to develop national action plans to contact the secretariat<sup>1</sup>, subject to the availability of resources (technical and financial). UNEP received the request for support from three countries.

**Technical support provided to the Working Group through the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management (GPNM).** As an outcome of the third meeting of the Working Group, the GPNM provided technical support to the Working Group through: a) information-sharing, technical webinars held between meetings, b) organization of informal expert [meetings](#) following the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Working Group, to allow for technical focal point [discussions](#) in an informal setting, and c) support Member States by, where appropriate, sharing existing information and knowledge in the development of an evidence-based and inter-sectoral coherent approach to domestic decision-making to promote sustainable nitrogen management, where appropriate. The GPNM proved having an important role in supporting the work of the Working Group, by providing a technical and multi-stakeholder perspective on the main topics from the Working Group agenda.

### **Facilitating improved coordination of policies across the global nitrogen cycle**

**The Working Group considered possible options and modalities for improved coordination of policies** across the global nitrogen cycle at the national, regional and global levels, including an intergovernmental coordination mechanism for nitrogen policies. The working group itself may be considered a possible coordination mechanism; this was recognised at fourth meeting of the Working Group.

**In close collaboration with relevant United Nations bodies, including the FAO and CBD, options for better management of the global nitrogen cycle have been explored.** At the initiative of UNEP and FAO, the Environmental Management Group (EMG) held a [nexus dialogue on sustainable nitrogen management](#) in April 2023 to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The outcome of the nexus dialogue recommended, amongst other things, that a mapping of mandates and activities to address nitrogen waste within the United Nations be done to ensure coherence and coordination of programs and related activities. Considering the input received from this dialogue, UNEP is mapping out mandates across activities of UN organizations on sustainable nitrogen management to enhance coherence in planning and implementing UN related initiatives on sustainable nitrogen management.

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**UNEP Guide on Legal, Policy, and Regulatory Frameworks for an Integrated Approach to Reduce Nitrogen Footprint from Sectors.** The purpose of developing the guide is to support countries with information that can assist them to strengthen, develop, and implement laws, policies, and regulations to accelerate actions to significantly reduce nitrogen waste. This guide, which is being prepared in pursuance of resolution 5/2 and the Montevideo Programme V, recommends an integrated approach to address fragmentation in this area. The guidance on legal, policy, and regulatory changes required to reduce the nitrogen footprint from sectors to lead to the establishment of integrated regulatory and policy changes to reduce nitrogen waste globally will be completed by December 2023 (To be further updated).

**Identified potential options are as follows.**

Please be noted that:

- At the first meeting of the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen, it was agreed to establish an ad hoc Task Team to examine the possible Terms of Reference for an Interconvention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism (INCOM). It was agreed that the Task Team would report back to the second meeting of the Working Group. The Task Team met seven times and reflected on both UNEA resolutions 4/14 and 5/2.
- Identified options in this summary mean the options that were mentioned and elaborated in the submissions and/or interventions by many participants.
- These options are not exhaustive while there are other potential options that have been discussed by some participants but are not listed as identified options in this summary as it is impossible to list all the options. An overview of the submissions from focal points are compiled in the background document entitled “Compilation of substantive comments received from focal points after the second meeting of the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen on the Task Team report and the template for baseline screening on nitrogen actions” which was prepared for the third meeting of the Working Group. All the interventions from the focal points during the meetings of the Working Group are recorded in its meeting reports.
- It also should be noted that all the identified response options are not mutually exclusive. Current governance strategies and approaches were fragmented and did not adequately address the global issue of nitrogen pollution.
- The Working Group identified the need for coordination of activities and action under multiple agreements.
- The Working Group considered various barriers to sustainable nitrogen management, including challenges related to resources, capacity development and technology transfer in developing countries.
- Provide technical and policy recommendations/options to accelerate actions to significantly reduce nitrogen waste globally by 2030 and beyond through the improvement of sustainable nitrogen management. The Working Group is currently the most important forum for the Member States to work together and identify appropriate solutions for initiating actions on reducing nitrogen waste at Member States level. Still, for actions to be set in place, more time is needed. This should allow further progress to be made, particularly on awareness raising and involvement of relevant stakeholders in voluntary actions to be prepared and implemented, according to national circumstances.