

Committee of Permanent Representatives
Subcommittee Meeting
7 July 2022
10:00-13:00

**Background Document for Agenda Item 2:
Update on the implementation of Resolution UNEA 5/8: Science-Policy panel on chemicals, waste and prevention of pollution**

This note serves as a background document for consideration under Agenda Item 2: Update on the implementation of Resolution UNEA 5/8: Science-Policy panel on chemicals, waste and prevention of pollution.

The document highlights activities and outcomes related to the implementation of the resolution and mentions future planned activities.

The briefing will be followed by an exchange of views with Member States.

Overview:

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) through Resolution 5/8 adopted at its fifth resumed session (UNEA 5.2), decided that a science-policy panel should be established to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and prevent pollution. In the resolution, UNEA requested the Executive Director of UNEP to convene an ad hoc Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) that will begin work in 2022, with the ambition of completing it by the end of 2024, to prepare proposals for the science-policy panel. UNEA also requested the Executive Director, upon completion of these proposals to convene an intergovernmental meeting for the purpose of considering the establishment of a science-policy panel.

The UNEP Secretariat work towards the first meeting of the OEWG started immediately following UNEA 5.2. It is anticipated that the process to establish the panel will involve three OEWG meetings (one each in 2022, 2023 and 2024), allowing time in the latter half of 2024 to convene an intergovernmental meeting to consider establishing the panel. Given the limited time available and the congested meeting schedule of international meetings in 2022, the UNEP Secretariat to the OEWG has consulted widely, including a letter from the UNEP Executive Director to Member States dated 14 April 2022, to determine the availability of suitable venues and time slots for the first OEWG meeting (OEWG 1).

The Secretariat has also started work on the development of documents to be shared in advance of OEWG 1 and is planning a series of information sessions and outreach activities as detailed below in the lead up to and post- OEWG 1. The Executive Director has also established a Technical Advisory Group to advise her concerning her responsibilities towards implementing Resolution 5/8. The Secretariat is working with the Advisory Group to the Executive Director to prepare these documents. We are pleased to confirm that at the invitation of the Executive Director, Sir Bob Watson has agreed to chair this Advisory Group. Sir Bob Watson brings a wealth of experience from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) as well as other scientific assessment processes, and will work with the Secretariat to facilitate consultation with all relevant stakeholder groups during the OEWG process.

Work has also continued on resource mobilization to support the work of the OEWG process. In this context, we would like to thank the Governments of Switzerland, the United Kingdom and France for their contributions to support the OEWG process. While these resources will allow us to hold the first meeting of the OEWG (OEWG 1), there remains a need for Member States, in a position to do so, to come forward to host future meetings and to support the work of the Secretariat as it is extra budgetary in nature.

1. Scheduling and Location of OEWG 1:

- Letter to Member States from the UNEP Executive Director was sent on 14 April 2022 requesting them to nominate focal points, express interest in Bureau membership (through regional groupings), express interest in hosting OEWG meetings and consider providing financial support;
- Letters to major groups and stakeholders were sent on 17 June 2022. Similarly, a letter was also sent to WHO on 8 May 2022 given the specific UNEA request that WHO plays a role in this process.
- Indication of interest in hosting first meeting of the OEWG from the Government of Thailand during meeting with the Deputy Executive Director of UNEP on 24 May 2022;
- Formal notification on interest to host OEWG 1 has now been confirmed by the Government of Thailand;

- In the absence of any other offer to host OEWG 1, the Secretariat plans to organize OEWG-1 in Bangkok, Thailand;
- As highlighted, the last quarter of 2022 is very congested with the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 27), the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee towards a treaty on plastic pollution (INC Plastics), The Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Assembly. From consultation with Member States it has been highlighted that many Member States will find it difficult to attend OEWG 1 while one of the other processes is on-going. This significantly limits the available time slots for OEWG 1. Options considered included a delay of OEWG 1 to early 2023 but it was decided that this would result in a loss of momentum in the overall process. It was therefore decided to look for an earlier time slot to avoid overlap with other events already set in the calendar;
- Availability of a suitable venue, translation services and interpretation have therefore resulted in a decision to schedule the first meeting of the OEWG during the week of 3 October 2022 at the UN Conference Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting is scheduled to last four days and the provisional agenda and other meeting documents will be circulated to Member States and stakeholders in due course.

2. Informal preparatory work OEWG 1:

- The Secretariat has conducted a series of video conference calls, face-to-face meetings, and a Panel discussion at the Helsinki Chemicals Forum on the new Science-Policy panel in the past three months, including a series of side events at the recent Conference of Parties of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions (BRS COP). This effort will continue in the months ahead;
- Two webinar panel debates and information session events are now scheduled for 25 July 2022 and late September 2022. The first will call on a cross section of the Science community, civil society, Member States, and academia to examine options for the new panel and its place in the global community. The second event (date to be confirmed) will look at how the new panel can engage with industry and regulators;
- The Secretariat will also engage with Member States in the lead up to OEWG 1 at the fourth meeting of the intersessional process considering the Strategic Approach and sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 to be held in Bucharest, Romania, from 29 August to 2 September 2022;
- A tentative schedule of other events is planned during the intercessional periods but is reliant on availability of funding.

3. Funding of the OEWG process:

- We would like to thank once again the Governments of Switzerland, UK and France for their generous contributions to support the work of the Secretariat. These contributions are essential to allow OEWG 1 to be held. At this time, we estimate that following OEWG 1 there will be a need for additional resources to support the remainder of the process (OEWG 2 & 3), the intercessional process, and the operations of the Secretariat;
- We therefore encourage Member States in a position to do so to come forward with financial support to allow the process to continue.