

PRESS RELEASE

Further IPCC Strengthening Agreed at Plenary Session in Abu Dhabi

Decisions on Management, Communications to Implementing Ways of Handling Scientific Uncertainties Adopted by Governments

Outcomes Will Boost Quality, Transparency and Rigour Underpinning IPCC's Crucial Fifth Assessment Report

Abu Dhabi, 13 May 2011—A stronger governance structure and a set of forward-looking policies across a range of management issues were adopted today by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) at its 33rd Plenary Session in the United Arab Emirates.

The outcomes mark an important next step in the Panel's review process informed by the recommendations and suggestions of the InterAcademy Council (IAC).

The IAC is a consortium of national academies of science and research councils from around the globe which was requested by the UN Secretary-General and the Chair of the IPCC to assess the Panel's policies and procedures last year.

Rajendra Pachauri, the Chair of the IPCC, said: "I feel gratified that the process that the UN Secretary-General and I initiated a little over a year ago requesting IAC to review the IPCC's processes and procedures has culminated in such a successful outcome. The 194 governments which constitute the IPCC have put in enormous efforts to analyze the challenges facing the Panel, study the recommendations carefully and come up with decisions that strengthen its work".

The adoption and implementation of many of the IAC's recommendations in Busan in 2010 and now here in Abu Dhabi underlines how those positive proposals are being translated into positive decisions and positive actions on many key issues".

Today governments representing the 194-nation member IPCC adopted guidance on a communications strategy and implemented recommendations on how best to handle so called 'grey' literature from non peer reviewed sources such as government and agency reports.

At the 33rd Plenary Session the Panel also agreed policy and protocols on how to handle scientific uncertainties and corrections of errors in reports while agreeing to establish an Executive Committee to strengthen the overall management structure.

A modern and forward-looking conflict of interest policy, aimed at maximizing transparency and assuring the credibility of IPCC products and assessments was also adopted.

The implementation of the policy along with other next steps will be taken to the Panel's 34th Session scheduled for November later this year.

Chris Field, Co-Chair of IPCC Working Group II, which deals with climate impacts, adaptation and development, said: "Strong procedures are the absolute bedrock foundation for high-quality scientific assessments. With the enhancements to the procedures approved in Abu Dhabi, we are building upon the IPCC's firm foundations in order to make the next Assessment Report, due out in 2013 and 2014, the highest quality IPCC report to date".

"The upgrades to the procedures on ensuring thorough reviews, explaining uncertainty and what constitutes relevant literature should deliver a Fifth Assessment that is clearer, more nuanced, and more relevant to the needs of the global community," he added.

The discussions and decisions at this week's meeting build upon the outcomes of the 32nd Plenary which took place in Busan, Republic of Korea in October, 2010 where four Task Groups were set up to evaluate how best to take forward the IAC's recommendations and suggestions.

Dr Pachauri added: "I would like to thank the Task Groups who have volunteered their time, energy and wisdom to take forward this important process of IPCC reform. Governments have made it clear that strengthening the IPCC is an imperative in a world where the science of climate change becomes ever more complex and the need to understand its likely impacts ever more urgent. That commitment was the cornerstone of their engagement this week," he added.

Wetlands and Climate Change

In a separate development, the IPCC today also agreed to a new assessment of a methodology for estimating greenhouse gas emissions from wetlands.

This is aimed at supporting national governments and their reporting of inventories of greenhouse gases to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. An updated methodology, scheduled to be completed by 2013, should allow countries to scientifically and credibly calculate likely reductions in emissions linked to the restoration of lost or degraded wetlands.

Earlier in the week, the Panel also approved a Summary for Policymakers on a Special Report on Renewable Energy and Climate Mitigation which assesses that, with the right enabling public policies, renewables could take a significant slice of the global, total energy supply by 2050.

Notes to Editors

At last year's IPCC Plenary in Busan, governments accepted many of the recommendations and suggestions of the IAC and established Task Groups, in areas ranging from governance and management to how to develop guidance on IPCC external communications, to advise on how best to implement them.

These Task Groups were government-led and government-driven and during the past six months or so have developed comprehensive proposals that were presented at the IPCC Session this week.

Conflict of Interest

The IAC recommended: The IPCC should develop and adopt a rigorous conflict of interest policy that applies to all individuals directly associated in the preparation of IPCC reports.

The 33rd Session adopted a rigorous conflict of interest policy that covers:-

- Both financial and non-financial interests
- The distinction between a strongly-held view and a conflict of interest
- The need to execute the policy to reflect the various roles, responsibilities and levels of authority held by individuals within the IPCC process
- To mandate a task group of Governments to continue to complete a plan for implementing this policy--including a form for disclosure—for approval at the IPCC's 34th Session.
- To work towards early adoption of this policy, noting that two Working Groups and the Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories have begun to implement interim policies.

Todd Kriebel (New Zealand) and Munjural Khan (Bangladesh), co-chairs of the Conflict of Interest Policy Task Group, said: “ Here in Abu Dhabi we have established a clear policy on conflict of interest that draws on best practice globally. It will allow authors to get on with their crucial work, so it is their scientific integrity and the integrity of their assessments that is the focus of the wider world. What we have is a milestone: The next step is to embed the policy into IPCC processes as part of the wider IAC recommendations on management and procedures”.

Communications

IAC recommendation: The IPCC should complete and implement a communications strategy that emphasizes transparency, rapid and thoughtful responses and relevance to stakeholders and which includes guidelines about who can speak on behalf of IPCC and how to represent the organization appropriately.

- The 33rd session adopted a document with principles-based guidance for an IPCC communications strategy that will ensure objectivity and transparency as well as safe-guard the IPCC as a policy-relevant but policy-neutral organization
- The Panel clearly identified lead spokespersons for the organization and primary target audiences and asked for rapid response and global engagement in IPCC communications
- The Secretariat is in the process of hiring a Senior Communications Manager and today was mandated to develop a new communications strategy based upon the guiding document adopted at this session of the Panel.

Darren Goetze (Canada) and Antonina Ivanova Boncheva (Mexico), Co-Chairs of the Communications Strategy Task Force, said: “Modern, responsive and accurate communications is essential in a world with multiple channels of communication from newspapers, radio and TV to online journals and social networking to news delivered via iPods and mobile phones. Communications are vital in terms of effectively communicating the IPCC’s scientific findings to a wide audience and in handling controversies and crises in a factual and timely fashion. What has been agreed here in Abu Dhabi should better equip the IPCC and its Secretariat to deal with the communication challenges of mitigation and adaptation in a rapidly evolving and information hungry world”.

Governance and Management

The IAC suggested: The IPCC set up an Executive Committee to strengthen and facilitate timely and effective implementation of the IPCC’s Programme of Work.

- Today the IPCC set up an Executive Committee to strengthen the coordination and management of the IPCC, allowing urgent issues to be addressed between Panel Sessions including communication and outreach activities and the response to possible errors.
- The Executive Committee will be led by the Chair of the IPCC and its composition will include the IPCC's Vice Chairs, Working Group Co-Chairs and advisory members.
- Steps were also taken to consolidate the terms of reference of the Bureau of the IPCC—an advisory body which provides guidance to the Panel on the scientific and technical aspects of its work and advises on related management and strategic issues.

David Warrilow (United Kingdom) and Taha M. Zatar (Saudi Arabia), Co-Chairs of the Governance and Management Task Group, said: “Governments reviewed the merits of an Executive Committee and its roles and responsibilities. They concluded that such a Committee would indeed strengthen and streamline the way the IPCC functions and responds between Sessions. The question of whether an Executive Director should be appointed was also discussed but governments concluded that the current secretariat arrangements should be maintained”.

Scientific Uncertainties, Correction of Errors and ‘Grey’ Literature

The IAC recommended that the IPCC strengthen procedures on how all literature is reviewed and considered; document a wide range of scientific views; establish a procedure for dealing with errors that may arise and improve the handling of scientific uncertainties.

The 33rd Session adopted decisions relating to these including:-

- A standardized and consistent way of dealing with uncertainty throughout a report and a traceable account of how the lead authors of chapters arrive at their ratings for the level of scientific understanding of an issue
- A clear and timely procedure for evaluating and correcting genuine errors including a facility for those claiming an error to send it to the IPCC and receive a reply: corrected errors and errata will be posted on the IPCC web site

- Lead authors will consider the range of scientific, technical and socio-economic views and documents, even if there is no consensus on view on the findings, as long as they are scientifically and technically valid
- However, magazines and newspapers are in principle not valid sources and that blogs, social networking sites and broadcast media are not acceptable sources of information for IPCC reports

Øyvind Christophersen (Norway) and Eduardo Calvo (Peru), Co-Chairs of the Procedures Task Group, said "The decisions adopted here cover a wide range of issues, but at the centre of these decisions is increased rigour, transparency and clarity on how the IPCC manages its processes, including reviews and assessment reports and how it is assessing the wealth of data--the procedures adopted today will further minimize any possibility of errors in future reports."

About the IPCC

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the leading international body for the assessment of climate change. It was established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to provide the world with a clear scientific view on the current state of knowledge in climate change and its potential environmental and socio-economic impact. Currently, 194 countries are members of the IPCC.

Further details on the review process, where final outcome documents from the 33rd Plenary Session will be soon be uploaded, are at the IPCC website at www.ipcc.ch

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