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FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE IPCC

(Submitted by the Chairman)

Future Work Program of the IPCC

Issues paper drafted for discussion

**Robert Watson
Chairman of the IPCC
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Given that we are now nearing completion of the IPCC Third Assessment Report (TAR), it is both appropriate and timely for a plenary session of the Panel to start to consider the future IPCC structure and work program. An initial discussion of some of the issues outlined in this paper took place at the 21st meeting of the Bureau in Geneva in December, 2000.

I suggest the following schedule for determining the future scope and structure of the IPCC:

- April 2001 plenary session of the Panel in Nairobi, Kenya: full-day discussion on the future structure and role of the IPCC
- September 2001 plenary session of the Panel in London, England: full-day discussion, with a goal of agreeing on the broad work program, including possible requests from COP-6, and working group structure.
- March 2002 plenary session of the Panel - location not determined: Bureau election and finalization of detailed work programs.

If there is inadequate time at the plenary session of the Panel in September to agree on the broad work program and working group structure then it will not be possible to elect a new Bureau in March, 2002. Governments will need to decide who to nominate for the Bureau, and in what specific position within the Bureau, given that Bureau members should have the appropriate expertise for the position nominated. Hence, we would probably have to revert to the following schedule.

- April 2001 plenary session of the Panel in Nairobi, Kenya: full-day discussion on the future structure and role of the IPCC
- September 2001 plenary session of the Panel in London, England: discussion of possible requests from COP-6.
- March 2002 plenary session of the Panel - location not determined: full-day discussion, with a goal of agreeing on the broad work program and working group structure.
- October 2002 plenary session of the Panel - location not determined: Bureau election and finalization of detailed work programs

Historical Context

The IPCC was constituted in 1988 under the auspices of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), with a central secretariat established in Geneva, staffed by both WMO and UNEP. Since its inception in 1988 the IPCC has prepared a series of technical papers, special reports and comprehensive assessments.

Prior to the establishment of the current structure and Bureau in 1997, the IPCC successfully completed, *inter-alia*, two comprehensive assessments, the First Assessment Report (FAR) in 1990 and the Second Assessment Report (SAR) in 1995, in addition to one technical paper¹ and technical guidelines for assessing greenhouse gas inventories and assessing climate change impacts.

Since the current structure and Bureau membership of the IPCC was approved in the Maldives Islands in September, 1997, the IPCC has successfully completed three technical papers¹, five special reports², Good Practice Guidance and Uncertainty Management in National Greenhouse Gas Inventories, and the Working Group I, II and III reports of the Third Assessment Report (TAR). The only elements of the TAR yet to be completed are the Synthesis Report, and its Summary for Policymakers (SPM), which will be adopted and approved, respectively, in September this year in London.

The current structure for the TAR of the IPCC consists of three Working Groups and a Synthesis Report:

- **Working Group I** assessed the scientific aspects of the climate system and climate change;
- **Working Group II** assessed the scientific, technical, environmental, economic and social aspects of the vulnerability (sensitivity and adaptability) to climate change of, and the negative and positive consequences (impacts) for, ecological systems, socio-economic sectors and human health, with an emphasis on regional sectoral and cross-sectoral issues;
- **Working Group III** assessed the scientific, technical, environmental, economic and social aspects of the mitigation of climate change, and through a multidisciplinary task group, developed guidance papers for the methodological aspects of the cross-cutting issues of uncertainties; development, equity and sustainability; decision making frameworks; and costing methodologies; and the
- **Synthesis Report** synthesized information from all approved and accepted IPCC reports to respond to ten policy-relevant scientific questions (PRSQs).

The special reports and technical papers were prepared in response to a request from one or both of the subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), i.e., the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) or the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI). They were prepared under the guidance of the co-chairs and Bureaus of one or more of the Working Groups, with the exception of the special report on land use, land-use change and forestry that was prepared under the guidance of the Chair of the IPCC and a specially convened steering committee.

The TAR built upon the SAR, special reports and technical papers and involved an increased number of experts from developing countries, countries with economies in transition, industry, business and environmental non-governmental organizations. It placed increased emphasis on cross-cutting issues, such as uncertainties; development, sustainability and equity; costing methodologies; and decision-making frameworks. It also placed the issue of climate change more centrally in the context of sustainable development, and acknowledged the linkages of climate change with other local (air pollution), regional (acid deposition), and global (loss of biodiversity, land degradation and stratospheric ozone depletion) environmental issues. The Working Groups emphasized:

- Working Group I: observed trends in climatic parameters and sea level and the issue of attribution; natural climate variability (e.g., El-Nino phenomena); non-linear and extreme events; and regional and global scale climate and sea level projections;
- Working Group II: sectoral and regional impacts of climate change and adaptation measures;

¹ Technical Paper I: Technologies, Policies, and Measures for Mitigating Climate Change; Technical Paper II: An Introduction to Simple Climate Models used in the IPCC Second Assessment Report; Technical Paper III: Stabilization of Atmospheric Greenhouse Gases: Physical, Biological and Socio-economic Implications; Technical Paper IV: Implications of Proposed CO₂ Emissions Limitations.

² The Regional Impacts of Climate Change: An Assessment of Vulnerability; Aviation and the Global Atmosphere; Emissions Scenarios; Methodological and Technological Issues in Technology Transfer; and Land-Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry.

- Working Group III: relationship between climate change, sustainable development and equity; mitigation technologies and policies, including the Kyoto flexibility mechanisms, and ancillary benefits.

The assessment work of the IPCC can, to a first approximation, be divided into two categories: (i) risk assessment, i.e., Working Groups I and II; and (ii) risk management, i.e., Working Group III, and special reports that address issues of direct relevance to the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol negotiating processes, e.g., methodological and technological issues in technology transfer (technology transfer), and land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF). Certain aspects of WG II, e.g., analysis of adaptation options, can also be considered to be risk management. Hence, the work of Working Group III and special reports that address issues under consideration in the negotiating process, are likely to be more controversial in nature and more susceptible to politicization, especially during the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) approval process, than that of Working Groups I and II because they are closer to the science-policy interface. In addition, some issues discussed in Working III relate to vital, but more judgmental issues, issues such as equity.

The WG III report of the TAR and two of the special reports, i.e., (i) technology transfer, and (ii) LULUCF placed the IPCC squarely at the center of the science-policy interface because of the political relevance of the issues covered within the reports. Given this political relevance, it was not surprising that there was a perception by some government representatives, Non-Governmental Observers (NGOs) and scientific experts that a number of countries tried to use the SPM approval process for these reports to further their political agenda leading up to COP-6 by steering the SPMs in a direction consistent with their SBSTA and/or SBI negotiating positions. Similarly, there was concern that approval of the WG III SPM was also somewhat political given the issues covered prior to COP-6 resumed. However, in all cases the approved SPMs were consistent in tone and substance with the underlying reports, and in my opinion, and those of most of the coordinating lead authors, the SPMs were significantly improved over the versions submitted for final government review. Hence, in all cases the scientific integrity of the IPCC process was maintained, and the process ensured ownership by both governments and the scientific community.

The Future of the IPCC

In my opinion, the IPCC has been extremely productive during the last five years, improved its preparation and peer-review processes³, responded to the needs of the Subsidiary Bodies of the UNFCCC, and remained policy relevant, but not policy prescriptive. Therefore, the opportunity for the IPCC to continue to play a pivotal role in providing scientific, technical and economic knowledge to the Parties to the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol is unchallenged, yet within that opportunity the IPCC must be vigilant to remain apolitical and to maintain the high scientific and technical standards it has established since its inception.

As shown earlier, the IPCC has conducted a comprehensive assessment about every five years, and technical papers, special reports and methodological guidelines as needed. Technical papers, special reports and methodological guidelines can be initiated by the IPCC at a plenary session of the Panel, or in response to a request from the SBSTA or the SBI and subsequently endorsed by the IPCC at a plenary session of the Panel. Herein lies the opportunity and the challenge. The opportunity is to provide policy relevant advice in a timely manner on a wide range of issues of importance to the Parties to the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol. The challenge is to retain the scientific integrity of the process, especially the approval process for the SPM.

A key question that will affect the future scope of work for the IPCC is whether the IPCC should steer away from this science-policy divide? While I would argue no, this is a key decision for the governments. While the terrain close to the science-policy interface is difficult, I believe that this is

³ The Fifteenth Session of the IPCC in Costa Rica in April, 1999, approved a revised set of principles and procedures to guide the preparation and peer-review processes.

exactly where the IPCC can add most value. If the IPCC does not perform such assessments, another body would have to be created to provide independent and credible assessments of these complex and politically sensitive scientific, technical and economic issues. However, I would note that more precise mandates should be given to the Working Groups, especially Working Group III, so that during the SPM approval process, government representatives cannot claim that elements of the assessment are outside the mandate or too sensitive to include in the SPM.

So what do I conclude from this reflection on the evolution of the IPCC? In my opinion it is essential that the IPCC maintains its independence, credibility and transparency and that it should remain close to the science-policy interface. I also believe that we should work even more closely with the Parties to the UNFCCC in order to understand what type of scientific, technical and economic information is needed for decision-making. The IPCC should continue to accept the challenge of performing comprehensive assessments, technical papers and special reports, both related to risk assessment and risk management. If the IPCC accepts this challenge it must remain policy relevant, and must not become policy prescriptive, but needs to recognize that the line that divides the two is often quite narrow. However, I believe that the IPCC fully understands and recognizes the position of this line.

Key Decisions:

1. Should the IPCC continue to prepare comprehensive assessments? (**decision 1**), and if so:
 - what is the appropriate frequency for the comprehensive assessments? (**decision 2**);
 - should the Working Group that assesses past and future changes in climate (current Working Group I) precede the Working Group that assesses the impacts, adaptation and vulnerability (current Working Group II), and if so, by how long? (**decision 3**);
 - should the Working Group reports be more focussed and much shorter? (**decision 4**).
2. Should the comprehensive reports be supplemented by shorter, more focussed special reports on specific issues that integrate science, impacts, economics and policy options, as in the Synthesis Report? (**decision 5**), and if so, how should they be managed and approved? (**decision 6**)
3. Should the IPCC continue to be responsive to the needs of the Climate Convention, or other environmental Conventions (e.g., CBD or CCD) through the preparation of technical papers, special reports or reports on methodological issues? (**decision 7**), and if so:
 - how should they be managed and approved? (**decision 6**)
 - should the current principles and procedures apply for all special reports, i.e., a sequential expert review followed by expert/government review, or could a single simultaneous expert/government peer-review process be used in certain circumstances, subject to approval at a plenary session of the Panel, in order to be more responsive to a short-term need of the Parties to the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol? (**decision 8**).
4. What is the appropriate Working Group structure, and should the inventories task group become a fourth Working Group? (**decision 9**)
5. What is the appropriate size, structure and geographic representation of the Bureau? (**decision 10**).

Chairman's Perspective

Taking into account the albeit brief discussion at the Bureau meeting of some of the following issues and a number of written suggestions, I recommend that the work of the IPCC should continue, but it is imperative that it must maintain its independence, transparency, geographic balance, and ensure a balanced reporting of viewpoints. In addition I suggest:

- **Decision 1:** The IPCC should continue to prepare comprehensive reports.
- **Decision 2:** There are valid arguments for maintaining the five year interval, e.g., it is important to ensure that the Parties to the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol are regularly informed regarding the latest assessment of the state of knowledge. However, there are equally legitimate reasons for extending the interval between comprehensive assessments to seven years, e.g., we are placing unreasonable demands on the expert community and they need more time to advance the state of knowledge rather than simply assessing it. This is an issue that needs to be fully debated in plenary, and in consultation with the expert community.
- **Decision 3:** There are valid arguments for staggering the Working Group reports, e.g., in theory if the Working Group I report precedes the Working Group II report, then the latest model projections of changes in climate could be used in the Working Group II assessment of impacts and adaptation. However, unless the Working Group II report is delayed by more than one year it is not obvious that the results of Working Group I can really be used to perform new studies. Therefore, I remain unconvinced that staggering the Working Group reports will lead to a better assessment. In fact during the “delay” new climate projections might become available, hence there will always be an inherent delay between the research on climate projections and climate impacts/adaptation. The impacts community now has a rich and wider set of global and regional climate projections to use for their studies, which should be available for the next IPCC assessment. Another reason for not staggering the Working Group reports is that it would make the preparation of Synthesis report quite difficult (assuming that the Synthesis Report is viewed to be a valuable addition to the IPCC assessment process).
- **Decision 4.** It is quite evident that the Working Group reports are becoming longer and more technical, hence possibly of less value to some audiences and a greater burden on the scientific community. In my opinion there should be an explicit attempt to be more focussed in scoping the Working Group reports and a greater insistence of shorter reports.
- **Decision 5.** I would strongly advocate for a series of focussed special reports, especially if the interval between the TAR and the fourth assessment report is greater than five years. These Special reports could be initiated by the IPCC or in response to an external request.
- **Decision 6.** There are a series of options, each with implications for the approval process: (i) assigned to the most appropriate working group co-chairs and associated technical support unit(s) (TSU) as was the case for most of the previous special reports, and approved in a plenary session of the relevant working group(s); (ii) assigned to an ad-hoc chair and TSU and approved in a session of the plenary as for the special report on LULUCF; or (iii) assigned to an ad-hoc chair and managed through the Secretariat in Geneva and approved in a session of the plenary.
- **Decision 7.** I recommend that the IPCC remain responsive to requests from the UNFCCC and its subsidiary bodies in the form of technical papers and special reports, subject to the availability of financial resources, and the scope being judged to be appropriate. A plenary session of the Panel would evaluate whether the scope of the proposed special report is appropriate or whether it was too close to "policy". It is also plausible that the IPCC may be requested to perform an assessment in response to the needs of a Convention other than the UNFCCC, if so, I recommend that the request be given serious attention given the recognition of the strong scientific and policy linkages among the global environmental issues, e.g., the linkages between climate change and biodiversity.
- **Decision 8.** The rules of procedure were developed to ensure that the IPCC followed a well-defined transparent preparation and peer-review process. Given the experience gained in implementing the principles and procedures during the preparation of the recent special reports and TAR it is appropriate to assess whether they should remain unchanged or be modified under certain circumstances to be responsive to a possible short-term need of the Convention. For example, subject to approval at a plenary session of the Panel, a case by case decision could be made on whether a special report should be subject to just one round of peer-review (simultaneous expert/government) instead of two rounds of peer review (expert, followed by expert/government).

- **Decision 9.** The current working group structure is probably appropriate, but increased attention needs to be paid to cross-working group and cross-chapter issues. Given the importance of the inventories methodological work I would suggest that it be conducted under the auspices of a fourth Working Group in order to bring the work under the oversight of the Bureau.
- **Decision 10.** I recommend that the size of the Bureau remain at 30, with the current geographic representation, and with the following structure:
- Four working groups, each with a bureau of seven members, each with two co-chairs, one from a developed country and one from a developing country or country with an economy in transition
- Two co-chairs (or a chair and vice-chair) - in either case, one from a developed country and one from a developing country

The current structure is less than optimum because of a lack of well-defined roles for the five vice-chairs.