

Independent Review of the IPCC Assessment Process

Terms of Reference

Background

By the 1980s, concerns about global climate change had become widespread. This catalyzed a demand for knowledge and action from governments, civil society, the UN and other stakeholders. Responding to the demand, and in keeping with UN General Assembly Resolution 43/53 of 6 December 1988, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988 to provide the governments with objective, comprehensive and up-to-date information about climate change and its implications. Therefore, the initial task for the IPCC was to prepare a comprehensive review and recommendations with respect to the state of knowledge of the science of climate change; social and economic impacts of climate change, and possible response strategies and elements for inclusion in a possible future international convention on climate.

Since its creation, the IPCC has developed into a unique global assessment process that builds on broad participation of the best experts from different backgrounds and viewpoints, a robust multi-stage review process and strong partnership between the scientific community and the governments. The most important outputs of this process have been comprehensive scientific assessment reports about climate change released in 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2007. The reports provided authoritative policy-relevant, but not policy-prescriptive information on key aspects of climate, such as the physical science basis, impacts of and vulnerability to climate change in human and natural systems, options for adapting to impacts of climate change, and options for mitigation.

The IPCC is in the process of commencing work on its 5th Assessment Report. It has been IPCC practice that the Panel, which meets at least once a year at the level of government representatives, reviews its structure at the beginning of every assessment cycle and agrees on the scope and focus of the upcoming report. The structure and outline of the 5th Assessment Report have been agreed in the year 2009. The Panel also reviews its principles and procedures at regular intervals.

In view of the relevance of the IPCC assessments for global and sub-global policy-making processes, and to reduce the occurrence and minimize the potential impact of errors in the preparation of reports, further strengthening the IPCC processes and procedures is necessary to ensure continued scientific credibility of its assessments. A proposal to carry out a review of IPCC processes and procedures was communicated by the IPCC Secretariat to IPCC member governments in mid-February 2010. This was supported by environment ministers and government delegations at the 11th Session of the UNEP Global Ministerial Environment Forum held at Bali during 24-26 February 2010.

Subsequently, the United Nations Secretary-General and the Chair of the IPCC have come to the conclusion that an independent review of the IPCC process and the procedures for preparing reports is desirable. The executive heads of the founders of the IPCC, the Executive Director of UNEP, and the Secretary-General of WMO, concur with this conclusion. Collectively, they have decided to entrust this task to the InterAcademy Council (IAC), because it embodies the collective expertise and experience of national academies from all regions of the world. The IAC has agreed to undertake this task.

In carrying out this task, it is expected that the IAC, through its networks of national academies of sciences, will engage high-profile experts from relevant fields to prepare a report that presents recommendations on possible revisions of the IPCC procedures and other measures and actions. The recommendations will allow the IPCC to respond to future challenges and ensure ongoing quality of its reports. The review should pay attention to all IPCC Working Groups and the Task Force, and address the specific challenges by integrating different disciplines including from the physical, natural, social and economic sciences.

Scope, Objectives and Expected Outputs

In undertaking its work, the IAC will take into account the "Principles Governing IPCC Work", including their Appendices: Appendix A "Procedures for the preparation, review, acceptance, adoption, approval and publication of the IPCC reports" and its Annexes (hereinafter referred to as IPCC Procedures); Appendix B "Financial Procedures for the IPCC"; and Appendix C "Rules of Procedures for the Election of the IPCC Bureau and Any Task Force Bureau". It will also review IPCC policies and processes for admitting observer organizations and other relevant guidelines. The IAC will agree on its own rules of procedure and workplan, which clearly illustrate how it will ensure achieving the objectives of the review, including the modalities for necessary consultations.

The proposed terms of reference for the review are:

1. Review IPCC procedures for preparing reports including:
 - Data quality assurance and data quality control;
 - Guidelines for the types of literature appropriate for inclusion in IPCC assessments, with special attention to the use of non peer-reviewed literature;
 - Procedures for expert and governmental review of IPCC material;
 - Handling of the full range of scientific views; and
 - Procedures for correcting errors identified after approval, adoption and acceptance of a report.
2. Analyze the overall IPCC process, including the management and administrative functions within the IPCC, and the role of UNEP and WMO, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders, with a view to strengthen and improve the efficiency of the assessment work and effectively ensure the consistent application of the IPCC Procedures.
3. Analyze appropriate communication strategies and the interaction of the IPCC with the media to ensure that the public is kept apprised of its work.
4. Prepare a report on the outcome of the consultations referred to above, including:
 - Methodology of the report preparation and measures taken to ensure high quality of the report findings;
 - Recommendations for amendments to the IPCC procedures;

- Recommendations concerning strengthening the IPCC process, institutions and management functions;
- Any other related recommendations;
- Outline of a plan for the implementation of recommendations.

General Principles of Work

1. The IAC will conduct its work independently according to its procedures for carrying out expert studies. Other than providing relevant information, neither IPCC, WMO nor UNEP will have any oversight or control over the review process.
2. The Co-Chairs of the IAC will transmit the final report to the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General and the IPCC Secretariat, with copies to the Executive Director of UNEP, and the Secretary-General of WMO.

Support for the Independent Review

1. Experts contributing to the review will do so without any remuneration for their services.
2. UNEP and WMO will provide technical and secretarial support and financial resources, as requested by the IAC and as mutually agreed.

Schedule of the Independent Review

Because the organizational work for the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC has already begun, it is urgent that the IAC submits its report at the latest by 31 August 2010, to allow for the submission of a document for consideration at the 32nd Session of the IPCC in October 2010. Timely submission is essential to allow governments to consider the Report in advance of the Session and to be prepared to decide on actions that may be necessary. In this way the findings of the review can be built into the fifth assessment cycle in its early stages.