



PRESS RELEASE

Science body of UN convention on biodiversity provides advice to enhance progress towards achieving Aichi Biodiversity Targets

Montreal, 4 May 2016 – The twentieth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-20) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) came to a close on 30 April 2016 with the adoption of a number of key recommendations that provide the scientific basis for enhanced implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and achievement of its Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

SBSTTA is a subsidiary body of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and provides scientific, technical and technological advice to the COP. Its recommendations will be considered by Parties at their thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 13), set to take place 4-17 December this year in Cancun, Mexico.

SBSTTA looked at the implementation of Aichi Biodiversity Targets 11 (protected areas), and 12 (threatened species), and recommended that the COP, while welcoming the continued progress towards the achievement of Target 11 and acknowledging regional capacity building workshops and related activities, invites Parties to undertake concerted efforts to implement actions identified in national biodiversity strategies and action plans and other relevant strategies and, address any gaps identified through the regional capacity-building workshops on achieving Targets 11 and 12. For facilitating implementation of actions, SBSTTA further recommended that the COP invites Parties, relevant partners, regional agencies, bilateral and multilateral funding agencies, to enable support networks at the regional and sub-regional level, to build capacity and sharing of technical guidance, best practices, tools, lessons learned, and monitoring efforts. Both Target 11 and 12 are at the core of biodiversity conservation.

SBSTTA looked at the question of mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors, including agriculture, forests and fisheries, focusing its discussions on the steps that can be taken to enhance actions on mainstreaming in these areas, including by involving relevant stakeholders, and by taking into account relevant standards and best practice guidance related to biodiversity in these sectors. Mainstreaming will also be discussed by the Subsidiary Body on Implementation, with the combined recommendations of both bodies advanced to COP, as part of the thematic focus of the COP on mainstreaming of biodiversity in forestry, agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture, among other sectors.

SBSTTA also looked at the implementation of sectoral and cross-sectoral strategies and integrated landscape and seascape management that foster sustainable practices. As part of the recommendation adopted on mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors including agriculture, forests, fisheries and aquaculture, SBSTTA identified potential measures to contribute to the health and resilience of ecosystems and consider spatial and regional approaches and considered the issue of appropriate measures to promote



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the conservation and restoration of areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, habitats of threatened species, and recovery of endangered species.

SBSTTA welcomed the first assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) on pollinators, released in March this year, and noted the relevance of the conservation and sustainable use of pollinators for the mainstreaming of biodiversity in the food and agriculture sectors. It adopted a recommendation noting the importance of pollinators and pollination for all terrestrial ecosystems, including those beyond agricultural and food production systems, as well as recognizing pollination as a key ecosystem function central to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. SBSTTA also provided advice on the report's conclusions on potential impacts of pesticides, in particular neonicotinoids and other systemic pesticides on pollinator populations. It called upon businesses involved in the development, manufacturing and sale of pesticides to be fully transparent in releasing the results of toxicity studies, and encouraged academic and research bodies, as well as relevant international organizations, to promote and share future research to address gaps in knowledge.

Marine and coastal biodiversity issues were highlighted in this meeting of the SBSTTA, with a number of areas discussed:

- EBSAs: SBSTTA reviewed the outputs of three regional workshops to describe Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) and discussed practical options for further enhancing scientific methodologies and approaches to describing EBSAs, including through the potential establishment of an informal advisory group. The issue of EBSAs has been under consideration for a number of sessions of SBSTTA.
- Cold water corals: Parties adopted a voluntary specific work plan for biodiversity in cold areas. The focus was on cold-water corals and sponge fields, which play important functional biological and ecological roles.
- Marine debris: SBSTTA adopted guidance for Parties on preventing and mitigating the impacts of marine debris on marine and coastal biodiversity and habitats. This guidance includes promoting structural economic changes that would reduce the production and consumption of plastics, increase production of environmentally friendlier materials, increase recycling and reuse, and support an enabling environment for these changes through capacity-building, regulations and standards, and cooperation between industry, governments and consumers. The issue of marine debris, defined as any persistent, manufactured or processed solid material discarded, disposed of, lost or abandoned in the marine and coastal environment, is an increasingly important issue not only under the Convention, but also in other fora.

SBSTTA also considered the issue of ecosystem restoration. Parties agreed to a short-term action plan to promote restoration of natural and semi-natural ecosystems as a contribution to halting biodiversity loss, improving ecosystem resilience, enhancing the provision of ecosystem services, mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change, combating desertification and land degradation, and improving human well-being while reducing environmental risks and scarcities. These will serve as a flexible framework towards achieving Aichi Biodiversity Targets 5, 14 and 15, and Targets 4 and 8 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, as well as other internationally agreed goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

In discussing invasive species, SBSTTA recognized the importance of the Convention's guidance on introduction of pets, aquarium and terrarium species, and live bait and live food to address the risk of live species trade in wildlife under the circumstance of a fast growing e-commerce. The new guidance is expected to empower Parties to prevent potentially invasive alien species entering into the natural environment.

Discussions on the issue of synthetic biology concluded with governments agreeing to extend the mandate of the current Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Synthetic Biology, noting the operational definition: “synthetic biology is a further development and new dimension of modern biotechnology that combines science, technology and engineering to facilitate and accelerate the understanding, design, redesign, manufacture and/or modification of genetic materials, living organisms and biological systems”.

Regarding ecosystem-based approaches to climate change mitigation, SBSTTA encouraged Parties to integrate ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation into their strategic planning across sectors.

Discussions centred on the fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5)*, national reporting and indicators for assessing progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, encouraged Parties to use a variety of approaches, according to national circumstances, in assessing progress towards national implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, including quantitative indicators, expert opinion, stakeholder consultation and case studies, clearly documented in order to record uncertainty, contradictory evidence and gaps in knowledge to enable comparable assessments to be undertaken.

Some 500 participants from 109 countries plus partner organizations participated at SBSTTA-20.

In his closing statement, the Chair of SBSTTA-20, Andrew Bignell from the New Zealand Department of Conservation, noted: “We have less than 1340 days to implement the Strategic Plan and to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. This should not dishearten our efforts but rather increase our momentum. We must meaningfully translate the results of this meeting into real action on the ground actions. The natural world is indeed wonderful and beautiful and I must remind you that each and every one of us needs to take concrete steps to protect it. The time for action is now – by governments, by businesses, by individuals in ensuring an environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations.”

Note to editors

The SBSTTA-20 final report will be available at: www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=SBSTTA-20

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 196 Parties so far, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing are supplementary agreements to the Convention. The Cartagena Protocol, which entered into force on 11 September 2003, seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 170 Parties have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Nagoya Protocol aims at sharing the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies. It entered into force on 12 October 2014 and to date has been ratified by 74 Parties. For more information visit: www.cbd.int. For additional information, please contact: Johan Hedlund on +1 514 287 6670 or at johan.hedlund@cbd.int; or Ulrika Nilsson on +1 514 287 8720 or at ulrika.nilsson@cbd.int.