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**Ad hoc open-ended working group on a science-policy panel
to contribute further to the sound management of
chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution
Third session
Geneva, 17–21 June 2024
Item 4 of the provisional agenda****

**Preparation of proposals for the establishment of a science-policy
panel**

Towards a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution: an overview

Note by the secretariat

The Bureau of the ad hoc open-ended working group on a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution, at its thirteenth meeting, held on 31 January 2024, requested the secretariat to prepare a historical overview to apprise Governments, non-government stakeholders and other interested organizations of the progress achieved in the ongoing negotiations on a science-policy panel, including by documenting early calls for a science-policy panel dedicated to pollution and key milestones reached to date (as at 30 April 2024) towards the development of such a panel. The annex to the present note sets out a brief record of the process to strengthen the science-policy interface for the sound management of chemicals and waste and the prevention of pollution. The annex is presented without formal editing.

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Annex*

Towards a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution: an overview

I. Introduction

1. At its resumed fifth session, held in Nairobi from 28 February to 2 March 2022, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) decided, by its resolution 5/8, that a science-policy panel should be established to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.
2. By the same resolution, the Environment Assembly decided to convene an ad hoc open-ended working group (OEWG) to prepare proposals for the science-policy panel. The OEWG would commence its work in 2022, with the ambition of completing it by the end of 2024.
3. Throughout this process, the OEWG benefitted significantly from the insights and lessons learned from existing science-policy interfaces, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the International Resource Panel (IRP), the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) and the assessment panels of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.
4. The OEWG has also drawn lessons from various multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) such as the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Global Framework on Chemicals – For a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste, and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The OEWG has further drawn lessons from various intergovernmental organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
5. Section II presents an overview signalling growing recognition of the importance of a strengthened science-policy interface in landmark studies and global assessments, and global calls for a science-policy panel on chemicals, waste and pollution through various decisions and resolutions leading to UNEA resolution 5/8. Section III presents a brief overview of the OEWG process to date and section IV draws a few lessons from the record of process towards establishing a science-policy panel on chemicals, waste and pollution prevention.

II. Global calls for a science-policy interface on chemicals, waste and pollution

6. In the lead up to the adoption of UNEA resolution 5/8, the international community, through various decisions and resolutions, has increasingly recognized the need for a science-policy interface to support countries in their efforts to better manage chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution, and to implement relevant multilateral environmental agreements at the national level. The recognised potential benefits of a strengthened science-policy interface include improved access to high-quality and up-to-date scientific data and information for evidence-based decision making in the context of sustainable development, raised awareness about the socioeconomic drivers and impacts of unsound chemicals management, waste and pollution, and assessments to help identify priorities and potential solutions, particularly those relevant to developing countries.
7. The importance of a strengthened science-policy interface was also recognised and demonstrated through several landmark studies and global assessments, including for the use of science in monitoring progress, priority setting (e.g. for emerging issues or issues of concern), policymaking and action throughout the life cycle of chemicals and waste.
8. The proposed science-policy panel will sit alongside the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) to ensure that all pillars of the [triple planetary crisis](#) of climate change, nature and

* The annex has not been formally edited.

biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste, have a dedicated science-policy body to strengthen the evidence base; raise public awareness; identify issues of relevance to policymakers; conduct assessments of current issues, and, where possible, proposing evidence-based options to address them; provide up-to-date and relevant information; identify key gaps in scientific research; explain and disseminate findings for different audiences; and facilitate information-sharing with countries, in particular developing countries seeking relevant scientific information.

A. Global Chemicals Outlook I (2013)

9. In February 2013, UNEP published the first [Global Chemicals Outlook - Towards Sound Management of Chemicals](#) (GCO I), which highlighted the significant increase in the manufacture and use of chemicals globally, their importance to national and global economies, and the costs and negative effects on human health and the environment of unsound chemicals management, and made recommendations for future action. The report was “designed to inform governments and industry on trends in chemicals production, use and disposal and related pollution impacts and challenges, while offering policy advice” and “targeted to decision makers in order to build capacity and to implement policy change to protect the environment and human health.”

B. Governing Council Decision 27/12: Chemicals and Waste Management (2013)

10. In 2013, at the first universal session the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the UNEP Governing Council through its decision 27/12 ([UNEP/GC.27/17](#)) recognized the potential benefits of a scientifically sound and evidence-based detailed assessment of the state of the environment for awareness-raising, informed policy formulation and decision-making in the context of sustainable development as well as the significance of the findings of the Global Chemicals Outlook (GCO). It requested the work on the GCO to continue, particularly in areas where data were found to be lacking or inadequate, and to enhance transparency through regionally balanced stakeholder involvement, *inter alia*, with a view to developing in the future a tool for assessing progress towards the achievement of the sound management of chemicals and hazardous wastes, including the 2020 target under Sustainable Development Goal 12, taking into account and building upon other existing sources of information.

11. The resolution decided that UNEP “will promote a strong science policy interface by reviewing the state of the environment, by building on existing international instruments, assessments, panels and information networks, including through an enhanced Summary for Policy Makers of the Global Environment Outlook,” and in this regard, requested the Executive Director to identify critical gaps and present a report, with recommendations, to the governing body ([decision 27/2](#), paragraph 8).

C. UNEA Resolution 1/4: Science-policy interface (2014)

12. At its first session, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 23-27 June 2014 (UNEA-1), the Environment Assembly, through its resolution 1/4 recognized “the potential benefits of a scientifically sound and evidence-based detailed assessment of the state of the environment for awareness-raising, informed policy formulation and decision-making in the context of sustainable development.”

13. The resolution recalled decision 27/11 and paragraph 90 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and called for “strengthened assessment activities and improved access to data and information, and noting the need to integrate the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development and to disseminate and share evidence-based environmental information on critical and emerging economic, environmental and social issues.”

14. The resolution recognized “gaps in our knowledge of the state of the environment resulting from a lack of current data and information generation and dissemination,” and noted that “there is an urgent need for Governments to take action to bridge those gaps through the building of capacities, the strengthening of existing mechanisms, including those of the multilateral environmental agreements, for monitoring the state of the environment and producing policy-relevant environmental assessments, which should be based on the use of established comparable methods for data collection and analysis, paying particular attention to the needs and circumstances of developing countries.”

15. The resolution requested the Executive Director to “promote a strong science-policy interface by expanding partnerships with centres of excellence and research programmes, promoting integrated and peer-reviewed environmental assessments and policy analysis and working closely with member States, business and experts to establish up-to-date quality-assured data flows” and to foster collaboration with multilateral environmental agreement secretariats, relevant United Nations agencies and programmes and scientific panels for joint efforts to strengthen the science-policy interface and provide tools for integrated approaches and informed decision-making; and to submit a gap analysis

report on environmental data, information and assessments as well as recommendations on policy instruments for a strengthened science-policy interface to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its second session.

D. UNEA Resolution 2/7: Sound management of chemicals and wastes (2016)

16. At its second session, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 23-27 May 2016 ([UNEA-2](#)), UNEA through its resolution 2/7 ([UNEP/EA.2/RES.7](#)) requested an update to the Global Chemicals Outlook including an overview of policies and actions that could be adopted, as appropriate given national needs and priorities, in order to reach related Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

17. The resolution invited countries, international organizations and other interested stakeholders, including the private sector having relevant experience with the issue of sustainable chemistry, to submit to the UNEP secretariat best practices, indicating how these may enhance the sound management of chemicals, *inter alia* through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and chemicals- and waste-related multilateral environmental agreements.

E. The *Lancet* Commission on pollution and health (2017)

18. On 19 October 2017, the Lancet Commission on pollution and health published [The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health](#) and made six recommendations to “raise global awareness of pollution, end neglect of pollution-related disease, and mobilise the resources and the political will needed to effectively confront pollution,” including to “make pollution prevention a high priority nationally and internationally” and to “mobilise, increase, and focus the funding and the international technical support dedicated to pollution control.”

F. UNEA Resolution 3/4: Environment and health (2017)

19. At its third session, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya on 4-6 December 2017 (UNEA-3), the Environment Assembly through its resolution 3/4 ([UNEP/EA.3/Res.4](#)) requested “the Executive Director to present a report on the environmental and health impacts of pesticides and fertilizers and ways of minimizing them, given the lack of data in that regard, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other relevant organizations by the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.”

20. The resolution reaffirms the importance of applying the precautionary approach as set forth in principle 15 of the [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development](#), as well as of supporting and facilitating the regular exchange of evidence and science-based knowledge.

G. Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface: A gap analysis (2017)

21. UNEP also launched the [Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface: A gap analysis](#) report at that time at the Science Policy Business Forum, held in Nairobi, Kenya on 2-3 December 2017. The study was executed in response to UNEP Governing Council decision 27/2 and UNEA resolution 1/4. It aimed to identify new ways to improve the science-policy interface by providing a summary of the characteristics of an effective science-policy interface, identifying the gaps found in practice in science-policy interfaces and providing practical steps that Member States and international organizations can take to fill these gaps. Key findings were also presented to Member States during the 4th global authors meeting of the sixth Global Environment Outlook, which took place from 19-23 February 2018 in Singapore.

22. The study pointed to three key elements for an effective science-policy interface: 1) Links in the chain: Motivated and capable individuals, able to utilise and exchange evidence and expertise to influence decision outcomes; 2) The right evidence: Availability of the appropriate data and expertise, and 3) Productive exchange of this evidence between individuals in the pathways.

23. The study points to challenges driving an evolution in science-policy interface activities, including engaging with a ‘post-normal’ scientific context, in a political context where “decisions are urgent, uncertainty is high and political will fluctuates rapidly.”

H. UNEA Resolution 4/8: Sound management of chemicals and waste (2019)

24. At its fourth session, held in Nairobi, Kenya from 11 to 15 March 2019 ([UNEA-4](#)), the Environment Assembly through its resolution 4/8 ([UNEP/EA.4/RES.8](#)) emphasized the importance of strengthening the science-policy interface and the global evidence base for chemicals and pointed to “the urgent need to strengthen the science-policy interface at all levels to support and promote science-based local, national, regional and global action on the sound management of chemicals and waste

beyond 2020; the use of science in monitoring progress thereon; and priority setting and policymaking throughout the life cycle of chemicals and waste, taking into account the gaps and scientific information in developing countries”.

25. The resolution also requested the UNEP Executive Director to prepare “an assessment of options for strengthening the science-policy interface at the international level for the sound management of chemicals and waste, taking into account existing mechanisms, including under the United Nations Environment Programme, and relevant examples in other areas, in order to maximize cost-effectiveness, make best use of new technologies, track progress and improve implementation of relevant multilateral environmental agreements at the national level, and make the assessment available for consideration by all stakeholders prior to the fifth meeting of the International Conference on Chemicals Management.”

I. Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface in International Chemicals Governance: UNEA 4 Information document (UNEP/EA.4/INF.9)

26. For UNEA 4, UNEP also developed the two-part information document *Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface in International Chemicals Governance* ([UNEP/EA.4/INF.9](#)). The first part sets out the summary of a “Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface in International Chemicals Governance,” that was held in Geneva, Switzerland on 15-16 November 2018 and attended by a broad range of stakeholders. It reflected experts’ views on 1) needs for a strong, two-way science-policy interface, 2) understanding the current interface, 3) possible functions of a strengthened interface, 4) specifics to be considered in the design of a strengthened interface, and 5) institutional arrangements. Functions of a strengthened science-policy interface were suggested by participants (without prioritization), and these included early warning and horizon scanning with outcomes brought to the attention of policy communities; conducting peer-reviewed scientific assessments and translating results for different audiences, including in languages other than English; covering emerging and legacy issues of concern, as well as generic chemical management issues; and providing knowledge management (including capacity building) to ensure easy accessibility to the extensive range of existing information and knowledge at all levels, including options for the context-specific prioritization of data for different communities/countries.

27. Several specific characteristics were suggested by different participants to be potentially considered in the design of a strengthened science-policy interface. These included credibility, legitimacy, saliency, transparency and flexibility; being policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive; providing a balanced, multidisciplinary perspective and ensuring an inclusive approach; and a consideration of the needs of developing countries, countries with economies in transition, and the poor in all countries, including consideration of the very different circumstances that can exist. The second part of the information document on “Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface in International Chemicals Governance” sets out results of a mapping and gap analysis conducted by the International Panel on Chemical Pollution (IPCP) between July 2018 and January 2019. The analysis first outlines desirable objectives and functions of a strong, two-way science-policy interface identified by a group of international experts. In a second step, it maps the existing science-policy interface bodies in the chemicals and waste cluster and identifies current gaps based on the outlined desirable objectives and functions. The authors further explore possible options for strengthening the interface, *inter alia*:

- An intergovernmental mechanism modelled upon the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES);
- A “network of networks” to connect existing interface bodies and beyond; and
- Expanding activities of Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) organizations.

J. Global Chemicals Outlook II (2019)

28. On 29 April 2019, UNEP published the [Global Chemicals Outlook II: From Legacies to Innovative Solutions](#) (GCO II) at a side event at the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention (BC COP-14), the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention (RC COP-9) and the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention (SC COP-9).

29. The report followed a five-part structure:

- [Introduction and key messages for policymakers](#)

- [Part I: The evolving chemicals economy: status and trends relevant for sustainability](#)
- [Part II: Where do we stand in achieving the 2020 goal – assessing overall progress and gaps](#)
- [Part III. Advancing and Sharing Chemicals Management Tools and Approaches: Taking Stock, Looking into the Future](#)
- [Part IV: Enabling policies and action to support innovative solutions](#)
- [Part V: Scaling up collaborative action under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)
- [Index](#)

30. On 11 March 2019 at UNEA-4, UNEP launched the GCO II Synthesis Report which summarizes key findings and insight of GCO II following the same five-part structure as the full report. The report presented a range of options for the implementation of actions to reach relevant SDGs and targets up to and beyond 2020 including to “Bring knowledge to decision-makers: Strengthen the science-policy interface and the use of science in monitoring progress, priority setting (e.g. for emerging issues), and policy-making throughout the life cycle of chemicals and waste.” Key steps include harmonization of scientific research protocols (e.g. for biomonitoring); developing science-based criteria to identify emerging issues at the international level taking into account harm (e.g. using health impact information) and monitoring their implementation; providing research funding to fill identified gaps and priorities; developing a study on the global costs of inaction and benefits of action on chemicals and waste management, comparable to the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change; and developing and improving institutional mechanisms to improve knowledge generation and management.

31. A shorter [Summary for Policymakers](#) was tabled at UNEA-4 as a working document, calling for more ambitious action at all levels. The summary for policymakers laid out key findings and key messages for the policy community, including that “a comprehensive global framework is needed, with ambitious priorities and coherent indicators,” and that “global knowledge gaps can be filled ... for example, by taking steps to harmonize research protocols, considering health or environmental impact information and harm caused to set priorities, and strengthening the science-policy interface through enhanced collaboration of scientists and decision-makers.”

K. Reports prepared for UNEA 5 (2020)

32. In advance of its fifth session, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 22-23 February 2021 and 28 February-2 March 2022 ([UNEA-5](#)), UNEP developed a series of reports focused on sound management of chemicals and waste:

- [An assessment of options for strengthening the science-policy interface at the international level for the sound management of chemicals and waste](#), which assesses the purpose, design, key features and impacts of existing science-policy interfaces (SPIs) at the international level; lessons learned from GCO II; and how strengthened SPIs can support and promote science-based policy making, priority setting and monitoring throughout the life cycle of chemicals and waste at local, national, regional and global levels, taking into account the gaps in scientific information in developing countries.
- The [Green and Sustainable Chemistry: Framework Manual](#), which aims to facilitate a better understanding and provide guidance to countries and stakeholders relevant for advancing green and sustainable chemistry. It builds on the 2019 UNEP report “Analysis of Stakeholder Submissions on Sustainable Chemistry Pursuant to UNEA Resolution 2/7” and the GCO II. It is accompanied by an executive summary.
- The [Synthesis report on the environmental and health impacts of pesticides and fertilizers and ways of minimizing them](#) presents a review of the information base and update the current knowledge to enable other advocacy actions to be taken by stakeholders to minimize the adverse impacts of pesticides and fertilizers. The report seeks to update understanding of current pesticide and fertilizer use practices; present major environmental and health effects of pesticides and fertilizers, during their life cycle, and identify key knowledge gaps; review current management practices, legislation and policies aimed at reducing risks in the context of the global chemicals, environmental and health agenda; and identify opportunities to minimize environmental and health impacts, including proven and innovative approaches. It is accompanied by a [Summary for Policymakers](#).
- The [Assessment Report on Issues of Concern: Chemicals and Waste Issues Posing Risks to Human Health and the Environment](#), which aims to inform the international community about the current situation of specific issues of concern, based on a review of published

evidence, in order to support further discussion at UNEA-5 and other international forums working towards sound management of chemicals and waste.

33. The report assesses the eight [emerging policy issues and other issues of concern](#) identified under SAICM: chemicals in products (CiP), endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs), environmentally persistent pharmaceutical pollutants (EPPPs), hazardous substances in the life cycle of electrical and electronic products (HSLEEP), highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs), lead in paint, nanotechnology and manufactured nanomaterials (nanomaterials), and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFASs). It reviews how current regulatory and policy frameworks address them through specific instruments and actions, building on GCO II findings and highlighting challenges and opportunities.

34. The report also addresses the 11 issues with emerging evidence of risks identified by GCO II: arsenic, bisphenol A (BPA), cadmium, glyphosate, lead, microplastics, neonicotinoids, organotins, phthalates, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and triclosan. It assesses current exposure as well as instruments and actions under current regulatory and policy frameworks, highlighting challenges and opportunities. Background information on environmental or human health effects of the issues are also provided based on existing assessments by national governments and intergovernmental institutions, to raise awareness among governments and stakeholders. It is accompanied by an executive summary.

- [An assessment on linkages with other clusters related to chemicals and waste management and options to coordinate and cooperate on areas of common interest](#) seeks to build upon cooperation and coordination initiatives already in place between chemicals and waste management and seven related clusters: health, biodiversity, world of work, climate change, agriculture and food, human rights and sustainable consumption and production. It also aims to explore means to further scale up such efforts and provide elements for consideration by the intersessional process for SAICM and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020. UNEP was invited to prepare this paper during the third meeting of the OEWG for SAICM in 2019.
- The report on the environmental impacts of antimicrobial resistance and the causes for the development and spread of resistance in the environment, which seeks to address the environmental impacts of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) including the gaps in understanding those impacts and causes and details the drivers, pathways and mechanisms by which antimicrobial resistance is developed and spread in the environment. A [Summary for Policymakers](#) was launched on the sidelines of [UNEA 5.2](#), followed by a final report titled [Bracing for Superbugs: Strengthening environmental action in the 'One Health' response to antimicrobial resistance](#) in 2023.

L. Science open letter: We need a global science-policy body on chemicals and waste

35. In February 2021, a group of twelve scientists publish the open letter with the title [We need a global science-policy body on chemicals and waste](#) in the high-impact journal *Science*. The International Panel on Chemical Pollution (IPCP), an independent international network of academic researchers in the field of chemical pollution, also set up a [sign-on campaign](#) after the letter's release. The sign-on campaign concluded with support from nearly 2,100 scientists and practitioners from over 90 countries (the campaign ran from 10 March 2021 to 22 February 2022).

M. ILO Report: Exposure to hazardous chemicals at work and resulting health impacts: a global review (2021)

36. On 17 May 2021, the ILO released the report, [Exposure to hazardous chemicals at work and resulting health impacts: a global review](#), which presents the results of a global review undertaken amidst growing international concern over chemical safety to provide a sound evidence base towards policy efforts to protecting the health and safety of workers from occupational chemical exposures. The report calls to “Enhance the science-policy interface for OSH” (Occupational Safety and Health) and states that “Developing a robust, two-way science-policy interface as part of the global efforts for the sound management of chemicals represents a priority for the work of world.”

N. UNEA Decision 5/2: Medium-term strategy for 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023

37. At UNEA-5, the Environment Assembly through its decision 5/2 approved [For People and Planet: the United Nations Environment Programme strategy for tackling climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste from 2022-2025](#), which includes a science-policy sub-programme which “delivers scientifically credible data, information and knowledge and provides

policy-relevant analysis and policy recommendations to catalyse and accelerate solutions and actions for the environment based on a continuous review of global status and trends.”

38. Actions and interventions under this sub-programme include “Developing an inclusive science-policy interface that speaks to all” wherein “UNEP’s intervention will focus on building the capacities of national and local decision makers to manage and synthesize scientific knowledge and embed science in their decisions that drive actions on climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. UNEP will pursue broad stakeholder engagement as a critical step to enhance societal understanding, acceptance and uptake of its scientific analysis.”

O. UNEA Resolution 5/8: Science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution (2022)

39. Through its resolution 5/8 ([UNEP/EA.5/Res.8](#)), the United Nations Environment Assembly decided to establish a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution. Further, through the resolution, the Environment Assembly decided to convene, subject to the availability of resources, an ad hoc open-ended working group that will begin work in 2022, with the ambition of completing it by the end of 2024.

40. The resolution recognized the importance of science-based assessments to inform decision-making processes and acknowledged that improving the availability of scientific information and assessments can address capacity challenges, enable more effective and efficient action to minimize and prevent the adverse impact of the unsound management of chemicals and waste, and prevent pollution to improve human well-being and contribute to the prosperity of all.

41. Through the resolution, the United Nations Environment Assembly stated that it is “Convinced that a science-policy panel could support countries in their efforts to take action, including to implement multilateral environmental agreements and other relevant international instruments, promote the sound management of chemicals and waste, and address pollution by providing policy-relevant scientific advice on issues, and that it could further support relevant multilateral agreements, other international instruments and intergovernmental bodies, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in their work.”

42. Through the resolution, the Environment Assembly also decided that the ad hoc open-ended working group will prepare proposals for the science-policy panel to consider the following issues:

- (a) Institutional design and governance of the panel;
- (b) Name and scope of the panel;
- (c) Principal functions of the panel, as set out in paragraph 2 of the resolution, while respecting the mandates of relevant multilateral agreements and other international instruments and intergovernmental bodies, avoiding overlap and duplication of work, and promoting coordination and cooperation;
- (d) Relationships of the panel with relevant key stakeholders, including governmental and non-governmental organizations, and civil society;
- (e) Processes for determining and executing the work programme of the panel;
- (f) Arrangements for identifying and engaging with experts to contribute to the work of the panel;
- (g) Procedures for the review and adoption of reports and assessments produced by the panel;
- (h) Arrangements for secretariat support for the panel;
- (i) Options for voluntary financing of the work of the panel;
- (j) Rules of procedure and the operating principles governing the work of the panel;
- (k) An indicative budget for the panel;
- (l) Any other matters that the ad hoc open-ended working group believes should be addressed;

43. Through the resolution, the Environment Assembly further decided that the ad hoc open-ended working group should take into account the need to ensure that the panel:

- (a) Is able to deliver outputs that are policy relevant without being policy prescriptive;
- (b) Is interdisciplinary, ensuring contributions from experts with a broad range of disciplinary expertise; has inclusive participation, including indigenous peoples; and has geographical, regional and gender balance;
- (c) Has procedures that seek to ensure that the work of the panel is transparent and impartial and that it can produce reports and assessments that are credible and scientifically robust;

- (d) Undertakes work that is complementary to and does not duplicate the work of the relevant multilateral agreements, other international instruments and intergovernmental bodies, including those that are members of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals;
- (e) Coordinates, as appropriate, with other science-policy bodies, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services;
- (f) Has the ability to address potential conflicts of interest and safeguard commercially sensitive information;
- (g) Has the flexibility to respond, to the extent possible, to the needs identified by stakeholders and agreed to by its member Governments, and to fulfil its principal functions, as set out in the present resolution;
- (h) Is cost-effective, with the leanest structure consistent with achieving the highest impact;

44. The resolution requests the Executive Director to cooperate closely with the secretariats of relevant multilateral environmental agreements and relevant international organizations and bodies, as appropriate; to convene meetings of the OEWG and invite the World Health Organization to play a role, as appropriate; to report on the outcomes of the ad hoc open-ended working group to UNEA and to relevant multilateral agreements, other international instruments and intergovernmental bodies; and to provide a secretariat for the ad hoc open-ended working group and prepare the analytical and summary reports necessary for its work.

P. The Lancet Commission on pollution and health (2022)

45. On 17 May 2022, the Lancet Commission on pollution and health published the report [Pollution and health: a progress update](#), which provided an updated to its 2017 report cited in section E of this document. The report finds that “Pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss are closely linked. Successful control of these conjoined threats requires a globally supported, formal science–policy interface to inform intervention, influence research, and guide funding.”

46. It also reports that “A process to establish a science–policy interface (SPI) for chemicals and wastes has been launched at the UN Environment Assembly in 2022. Such a programme mirrors the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. It will be important for WHO to be fully involved in launching the process, and the scope of this programme should preferably span all forms of pollution. The SPI would need to receive broad governmental and multilateral support (including funding), and should draw on existing knowledge and expertise from a wide range of stakeholders.”

Q. Secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions: From science to action under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions (2022)

47. In June 2022, the secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm (BRS) conventions published the report [From science to action under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions](#) which outlines the role of BRS Conventions for coordinated science-based global action to address the impacts of chemical pollution on human health and the environment. The report identifies possible synergies between existing mechanisms of the BRS conventions and the future science-policy panel, and how the new panel can work effectively and efficiently with these mechanisms.

48. Drawing on the experience of these conventions, the report offers some suggestions for stakeholders to consider in the planning of a new science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and prevent pollution.

49. The report also notes that in 2019 the conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) conventions requested the secretariat to undertake capacity-building and training activities to support Parties in science-based decision-making and action in the implementation of the BRS conventions. The conventions have regional or sub-regional coordinating centres for capacity building and technology transfer that are designed to cater to the specific needs of different regions and sub-regions as they deal with the specific circumstances and challenges that shape their work.

R. Secretariats of the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm conventions: Decisions on international cooperation and coordination with other organizations (2023)

50. In May 2023, the Conferences of the Parties (COPs) to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions adopted, respectively, decisions [BC-16/22](#), [RC-11/9](#) and [SC-11/21](#) on “[International cooperation and coordination with other organizations](#)”. The decisions unanimously welcome cooperation between UNEP and the respective secretariats of the conventions in the context of the ad hoc open-ended working group on a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution, pursuant to UNEA resolution 5/8. The decisions request the Executive Secretary to continue contributing to the preparation of proposals for the science-policy panel and cooperating closely with the Executive Director of UNEP in the context of the mandate of the science-policy panel.

51. The decisions reiterate invitations to Parties participating in the ad hoc open-ended working group to promote cooperation and coordination with the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, as well as complementarity and avoidance of duplication of effort between the work of the panel and that of the conventions, and to ensure close cooperation with the scientific and technical bodies under the conventions, as appropriate and that the extensive experience of the science-based promotion of the sound management of chemicals and waste is made available to the ad hoc open-ended working group.

S. World Health Assembly resolution 76.17: The impact of chemicals, waste and pollution on human health (2023)

52. The World Health Organization (WHO) is the science-led global public health agency of the UN that promotes evidence-informed approaches in policymaking and implementation. Given that [24% of the global disease burden can be attributed to environmental factors](#), a number of WHO science-policy activities are relevant to the work of the new panel.

53. On 30 May 2023, at its seventy-sixth session, the World Health Assembly adopted resolution [WHA76.17](#) on the impact of chemicals, waste and pollution on human health, which recognised UNEA resolution 5/8 and requested the Director-General of WHO to explore the full range of options for the future involvement of WHO in the science-policy panel.

54. Several options were presented to the WHO Executive Board in January 2023 that are further elaborated in information document UNP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/INF/5. Taking into consideration the relevance of the proposed panel to WHO’s work, the formulation of close and effective future working arrangements and avoiding duplication of effort will be essential in ensuring the relevance and legitimacy of the panel for health-related issues.

T. Fifth International Conference on Chemicals Management (2023)

55. On 30 September 2023, the Global Framework on Chemicals was adopted at the fifth International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5) and through resolution SAICM/ICCM.5/CRP.17. The Conference stressed the importance of establishing a science-policy panel and through resolution SAICM/ICCM.5/CRP.15 commits “to engage in the international efforts currently underway to establish a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.”

U. Global Waste Management Outlook II (2024)

56. In response to resolution 2/7 and reaffirmed in resolution 4/7, the second Global Waste Management Outlook, published jointly with the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA) in February 2024, provides a scientific global assessment of the state of waste management and an analysis of data concerning municipal solid waste management worldwide. It calls for the international community to scale up efforts to prevent waste generation; to extend adequate safe and affordable municipal solid waste management to everyone worldwide; and to ensure that all unavoidable waste is managed safely.

57. The report notes “some promising developments” in global waste management including “the Plastics Treaty negotiations have the potential to drastically reduce the quantity of plastic entering municipal waste streams; a science-policy panel has been established to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste; and reform within multinational banks is securing a stronger focus on climate change and equity,” and that “these high-level initiatives can influence action at all levels and in all countries to carry forward the zero waste and circular economy approach.”

III. OEWG: Preparing proposals for the science-policy panel

V. First session of the open-ended working group (OEWG 1.1 and OEWG 1.2)

58. The OEWG convened for the first part of the first session (OEWG 1.1) in Nairobi, in a hybrid format, on 6 October 2022. The OEWG considered procedural matters, including the establishment of a Bureau for the OEWG as well as budget and resources, and adopted the UNEA rules of procedure for the conduct of its work.

59. The resumed first session of the open-ended working group (OEWG 1.2) was held in person in Bangkok, Thailand, from 30 January to 3 February 2023. The OEWG elected a Chair for the open-ended working group, Ms. Gudi Alkemade from the Netherlands, agreed to establish contact groups to address: (a) organization of work of the OEWG; and (b) scope and the principal functions of the science-policy panel, and agreed on an intersessional work plan (see Annex III in the report UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.1/7).

60. The contact group on the organization of work of the OEWG provided the following:

- (a) The second session of the ad hoc open-ended working group would be held in person in the period between October 2023 and January 2024. The secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, would communicate the final date and venue of that second session by 1 July 2023 at the latest.
- (b) Following the generous offer by the Government of Switzerland, the third session of the ad hoc open-ended working group would be held from 17 to 21 June 2024 in Geneva.
- (c) The secretariat would initiate preparations for the second session, including the preparation of documents and intersessional activities.
- (d) The secretariat would update the budget and present it, as well as an overview of expenditures, to the second session of the ad hoc open-ended working group.

61. The OEWG decided on the following outcomes with respect to the objective and functions of the panel:

62. [The objective of the panel is to strengthen the science policy interface to contribute to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution for the protection of human health and the environment, with the following functions:]

- (a) Undertaking “horizon scanning” to identify issues of relevance to policymakers and, where possible, proposing evidence-based options to address them;
- (b) Conducting assessments of current issues and identifying potential evidence-based options to address, where possible, those issues, in particular those relevant to developing countries;
- (c) Providing up-to-date and relevant information, identifying key gaps in scientific research, encouraging and supporting communication between scientists and policymakers, explaining and disseminating findings for different audiences, and raising public awareness;
- (d) Facilitating information-sharing with countries, in particular developing countries seeking relevant scientific information;
- (e) Capacity building.¹

63. The OEWG further decided that the following two texts will serve as the basis for further consideration to describe the capacity building function:

- Provide capacity-building through all the functions of the panel and facilitate technology transfer, in particular to developing countries, to improve the science-policy interface at appropriate levels, including activities to ensure effective, geographically balanced and gender-responsive participation of scientists in the assessments of the panel, strengthen data generation capacity, enhance knowledge and skills that will support country infrastructure and human capacity, and facilitate connection and matchmaking of capacity-related needs and potential solutions.

¹ It was agreed by the OEWG that a fifth function on capacity building will be added but that further discussions were needed to finalize the text of the function.

- To build capacity to support the functions and work of the panel in order to strengthen the science policy interface for sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

64. On the objective, OEWG agreed the brackets indicate the proposed text for the objective “would remain in draft form, with the understanding that the ad hoc open-ended working group could update the wording based on future discussions” (report of OEWG 1.2 paragraph 79).

65. The OEWG also agreed on an intersessional work plan (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.1/7; see Annex III and its Appendix).

W. Intersessional work between OEWG 1 and OEWG 2

66. In between the first and second sessions of the OEWG, the secretariat convened eight Bureau meetings, five regional meetings, developed seven working documents and eleven information documents.

67. At its meeting of 14 November 2023, the Bureau requested the secretariat to develop, based on the working and information documents as relevant, draft text for the key elements of the proposals to be developed by the OEWG (as set out in what the Bureau referred to as the “skeleton outline”). The Bureau agreed these draft texts would be included in a separate information document to be shared in advance of the meeting, noting that it would be up to OEWG to decide if it wished to undertake its work towards developing proposals for the establishment of the panel on the basis of the proposed text, or chose another working method. The secretariat released these draft texts prior to OEWG 2 as [UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/INF/10/Rev.1](#), [INF/10/Add.1](#) and [INF/10/Add.2](#).

68. Regional meetings and briefings provided an opportunity for strategic discussions in preparation of OEWG 2 and were held back-to-back with regional meetings of the Minamata Convention on Mercury. The Asia Pacific Regional Meeting was held in Bangkok, in a hybrid format, on 7 September 2023; the Africa Regional Meeting was held in person in Nairobi, on 14 September 2023; the Regional Meeting of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), was held in person in Brasilia, on 7 October 2023; the Regional Briefing of the Group of Westerns European and Other States (WEOG) was held online on 8 and 9 November 2023; and the Regional Briefing of the Group of Eastern European States (EEG) was held online on 21 November 2023.

69. Several activities were undertaken for stakeholder engagement including widely disseminated calls for written submissions on various topics and documents prepared; side-events at relevant international meetings; informal consultations; and the “[Road to OEWG 2](#)” webinar and event series, organized in collaboration with the Geneva Environment Network (GEN) with the aim to:

- build bridges, promote collaboration and facilitate knowledge sharing between and among stakeholders;
- raise public awareness about the OEWG working towards the establishment of the science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution; and
- engage with the next generation of researchers, policy professionals and civil society actors who will take forward the agenda for safe and sustainable management of chemicals.

70. The webinar series included sessions on the development of operating principles of the panel ([26 April 2023](#)); building linkages from science to action ([9 October 2023](#), as a side event of the [fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury](#), and [2 May 2023](#), as part of the [2023 Conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions](#)); the right to science ([22 September 2023](#), as part of the [Geneva Toxic Free Talks](#)); linking science and action using a life-cycle approach ([6 September 2023](#), as part of the [World Resources Forum 2023](#)); options of engagement and participation modalities for major groups and stakeholders ([26 September 2023](#)); procedures for addressing conflicts of interest ([18 October 2023](#)); and a briefing session by the Chair and secretariat in advance of OEWG 2 ([28 November 2023](#)).

X. Second session of the open-ended working group (OEWG 2)

71. The OEWG convened for its second session in Nairobi from 11 to 15 December 2023 ([OEWG 2](#)), preceded by informal, regional and stakeholder consultations from 9 – 10 December 2023 at the same venue.

72. Delegates agreed to the use of the proposed “skeleton outline”, laying out in a single view each of the proposals for the establishment of a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

73. It was also agreed to consider UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/INF/10/Rev.1, INF/10/Add.1 and INF/10/Add.2 as the basis of discussions and establish four contact groups to address: (a) scope, functions, operating principles and conflicts of interests; (b) institutional arrangements; (c) work-related processes and procedures of the panel; and (d) intersessional work and budget in advance of the third session and beyond.
74. The texts resulting from the negotiations, form the outcome of OEWG 2 and are captured as an annex in the meeting report ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.2/8](#)).
75. The contact group on scope, functions and operating principles and conflicts of interest presented draft text on the operating principles of the panel; a conflict-of-interest policy; and the scope, objective and functions of the panel.
76. The contact group on institutional arrangements made progress on the membership and functions of the governing body of the panel, the Bureau, the interdisciplinary expert committee and other bodies as well as the secretariat, financial arrangements and strategic partnerships.
77. The contact group on work-related processes and procedures held initial discussion on the procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests in order to set the panel's work programme, procedures for the preparation of the panel's deliverables, and the nomination and selection of experts. The report back from the contact group can be found in the meeting report.
78. An additional contact group met to consider the OEWG budget and intersessional work proposed by the other contact groups as outlined below. The proposed budget for 2024 was recommended for approval and approved by OEWG 2. The OEWG further requested intersessional work from the secretariat as specified in the report of the meeting.
79. The secretariat also took the opportunity of having the presence of representatives of other science-policy interfaces, UN agencies notably UNEP and WHO, and MEAs related to chemicals, waste and pollution such as the BRS secretariat, to hold discussions in the margin of OEWG 2 on strategic partnerships.

Y. Intersessional work between OEWG 2 and OEWG 3

80. In between the second and third sessions of the OEWG, the secretariat convened five Bureau meetings and facilitated five regional meetings in preparation for OEWG 3, and developed eight working documents and seven information documents.
81. Bureau meetings were held online on [31 January 2024](#), [6 March 2024](#), and online and in person in Ottawa, Canada, on [23 April 2024](#), back-to-back with the fourth session of the [Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee](#) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment ([INC-4](#)). The final two Bureau meetings were planned on 3 and 16 June 2024.
82. Regional meetings and briefings were scheduled as follows: the [Western Europe and Other Groups Regional Consultation](#) on 8 May, online; the [Asia Pacific Regional Meeting](#) in Hangzhou, China, on 20-21 May 2024; the [Eastern European Group Regional Consultation](#) on 21 May, online; the [GRULAC Regional Meeting](#) in Montevideo, Uruguay, on 23-24 May 2024 and the [Africa Regional Meeting](#) in Accra, Ghana, on 29-30 May 2024.
83. Several activities were undertaken for stakeholder engagement including participation in stakeholder webinars and side-events; and the "[Road to OEWG 3](#)" webinar series, organized in collaboration with the GEN. The series included sessions on capacity building ([11 April 2024](#)), an introduction to the documents prepared for OEWG 3 ([7 May 2024](#)), the present document ([16 May 2024](#)), and a briefing session in advance of OEWG 3 ([6 June 2024](#)).

Z. Third session of the open-ended working group (OEWG 3)

84. The OEWG will convene for its third session ([OEWG 3](#)) in Geneva, Switzerland, from 17 to 21 June 2024, preceded by informal, regional and stakeholder consultations on 16 June 2024.
85. The main objective of the third session of the ad hoc open-ended working group is to finalize proposals for the science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and prevent pollution. The name of the panel is also expected to be determined.
86. The ad hoc open-ended working group may wish to also adopt a decision requesting the Executive Director of UNEP to transmit the proposals to the intergovernmental meeting convened for the purpose of considering the establishment of the panel.

87. The ad hoc open-ended working group will also develop proposals, for transmittal to the intergovernmental meeting, to be taken note of by the intergovernmental meeting and for onward transmittal to the governing body of the panel, for consideration at its first session.

88. All documents prepared for OEWG 3 are made available on the [OEWG 3 website](#).

IV. Lessons from the record of process

89. For over a decade, calls have been made at the international level to strengthen the science-policy interface for improved management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution. The above record of process provides a snapshot of major milestones that shaped the journey and the thinking to date for a science-policy panel. The lack of a global science-policy interface for chemicals, waste and the prevention of pollution became particularly obvious when looked at in the context of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss and pollution. This eventually led to Member States deciding at the resumed fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly in March 2022 to establish a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution – similar to the IPCC for climate change and IPBES for biodiversity and nature loss.

90. The Global Chemicals Outlook and the Global Waste Management Outlook series had meanwhile stepped into the space for providing global assessments on the state and trends in chemicals and waste management, as well as in providing policy options and practical solutions in the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Both emphasized the need for work to continue, particularly in areas where data were lacking or inadequate, and for such regular assessments to be relevant for policymakers taking into account their perspectives – including a solid understanding of the multiple considerations and practicalities relevant to potential solutions. However, the impact of the reports in terms of uptake of the findings by policymakers remained limited. A key finding was the need for a process or arrangements to systematically facilitate interaction between scientists, policymakers and practitioners operating along the life cycle of chemicals, an area of work which would likely be addressed by the new science-policy panel based on the way the proposals are taking shape.

91. As per UNEA resolution 5/8, the science-policy panel on chemicals, waste and pollution prevention should be an independent intergovernmental body with a programme of work approved by its member governments to deliver policy-relevant scientific evidence without being policy prescriptive. The panel would hence provide essential elements that might have been missing in the chemicals and waste outlook processes. A continuation of such global analytical work in the context of the science-policy panel could ensure that critical policy-relevant deliberations take place in a timely fashion during the development of assessments or related deliverables.

92. Furthermore, the record of process reveals at several points in time the need for broad stakeholder engagement as an integral part of a science-policy process that would result in practical and policy-relevant solutions. The engagement of relevant key stakeholders would avoid duplication and foster iterative exchanges building upon existing work, and furthermore provide the necessary views to ensure that an issue and possible ways to address it are practical and eventually utilised by making available appropriate data and expertise.

93. Finally, the wide range of topics considered over the years, for which the record of process only provides a few examples, shows the breadth of the issues and topics that the science-policy panel can potentially handle. Whereas the need for increased focus on health and the prevention of pollution seems clear, the issue of prioritization remains a key topic for the science-policy panel itself.