



The Ninth Plenary of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-9): sustainable use, values, and business (as usual)

Peter Bridgewater^{1,2} · Dirk S. Schmeller³

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Abstract

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) held its ninth plenary session in hybrid form at Bonn, Germany in July 2022. The plenary had a packed agenda with assessments on the Sustainable Use of Wild Species and Values of Biodiversity to consider, as well as discuss a “Nature Future Framework” and a scoping document for business and biodiversity. Here, we present key issues that emerged from the plenary and suggest some matters Platform members need to consider for the future.

Keywords Science-policy · Global assessment · Stakeholders · Nature conservation · Sustainability

Introduction

The Ninth Plenary of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) took place in Bonn, Germany on 3–9 July 2022, its tenth anniversary. A new departure was the hybrid form with delegations from several countries preferring remote participation to reduce their carbon footprint (as well as continuing travel difficulties due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic). The plenary had a charged agenda with assessments on the Sustainable Use of Wild Species and Values of Biodiversity to consider, as well as to discuss a Nature Future Framework and a scoping document for Business and Biodiversity.

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✉ Peter Bridgewater
Peter.Bridgewater@canberra.edu.au

¹ Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia

² Institute for Applied Ecology and Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT 2617, Australia

³ Laboratoire Ecologie Fonctionnelle et Environnement, Université de Toulouse, UPS, INPT, Toulouse, France

As with previous plenaries (Bridgewater et al. 2019; Schmeller and Bridgewater 2016, 2021) the published agenda proved far too optimistic, with two assessments to consider, as well as quite difficult issues to discuss in parallel. The recurring budget discussions also added to the workload, leaving the agenda overwhelming to delegates, authors, and observers alike. Below, we consider the key items that emerged from the plenary and suggest issues Platform members need to consider as IPBES move into its next decade.

Assessments accepted

Both assessments (Sustainable Use of Wild Species and Values of Biodiversity) due for review at IPBES-9 were accepted and had their summary for policymakers (SPM) approved. The Sustainable Use of Wild Species Assessment hit an early roadblock as delegates realised there were no key messages in the SPM, a previous standard practice in IPBES assessments. This necessitated a rapid recast with key messages being extracted in an unconventional way, which had skeletal messaging unsupported by the usual explanatory text.

The key messages from the assessment included:

- Billions of people in all regions of the world rely on and benefit from the use of wild species for food, medicine, energy, income, and many other purposes;
- Sustainable use of wild species is central to the identity and existence of many Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities;
- Ensuring sustainability of the use of wild species, including *inter alia* by promoting their sustainable use and halting overexploitation, is critical to reverse negative global trends in biodiversity.

Key messages

On policy, the key messages were that: (1) Policy instruments and tools are most successful when tailored to the social and ecological contexts of the use of wild species and support fairness, rights, and equity; (2) Policy instruments and tools are more effective when they are supported by robust and adaptive institutions and are aligned across sectors and scales. Inclusive, participatory mechanisms enhance the adaptive capacity of policy instruments. Note that use of the term institutions is confusing in this assessment (and even more the Values of Biodiversity assessment) as a typical understanding of institutions would be organisations or structure, yet in the assessments institutions is used to mean norms, legal frameworks etc. (3) A key policy message was that sustainable use of wild species requires transformative change in the people-nature relationship. Undoubtedly true, but how these conclusions will link to those of the recently commenced Transformative Change Assessment remains an open question that will hopefully be taken up by that assessment team as they progress their work.

The SPM of the Values of Biodiversity Assessment (full title: Methodological Assessment of The Diverse Values and Valuation of Nature) did have the traditional formulation of key messages, with detail backing each message up in later text and some particularly good graphics. The assessment is very thorough and covers the full suite of issues relating

to values, illustrating clearly what instrumental, relational and intrinsic values mean, for the first-time in IPBES assessments.

The first key message addresses achieving the 2050 vision for biodiversity and concludes that: “Achieving this vision depends on system-wide transformative change that incorporates the diverse values of nature aligned with the mutually supportive goals of justice and sustainability and its intertwined economic, social and environmental dimensions.” Remaining messages speak to how policy on biodiversity can benefit from inclusion of different values and world views.

Key message five is “More than 50 valuation methods and approaches, originating from diverse disciplines and knowledge systems, are available to date to assess nature’s values; choosing appropriate and complementary methods requires assessing trade-offs between their relevance, robustness and resource requirements”. A colleague, who is daily involved in policy, commented wryly that policymakers need better guidance than simply understanding that fifty ways of valuing are available. This continues IPBES’ major problem—exceptional knowledge assessment but poor translation across the science-policy interface. This was identified in the 2019 review (Bridgewater et al. 2019; Stevance et al. 2020) of the first work programme and has not yet reached its potential.

Key message eight is “Transformative change needed to address the global biodiversity crisis relies on shifting away from predominant values that currently over-emphasize short term and individual material gains to nurturing sustainability-aligned values across society”. As noted under the Sustainable Use of Wild Species Assessment, this begs the question on links between the proliferation of assessments thus far delivered, and currently underway. The Transformative Change Assessment held its first authors meeting in the weeks before IPBES-9, which would have been a good opportunity to get input from the values assessment, yet this did not happen.

Given the general poor level of funding, and the real possibility for ennui and burnout amongst contributors to the knowledge products, as more IPBES products are produced or are in gestation, the Platform must address the question of duplication and streamlining of its work. This is also necessary to have the impact on policy wished for, as duplication could give the impression that all knowledge has now been synthesized in the different assessments. Interest of decision- and policymakers in reading future assessments may then fall drastically, while there is still much to learn and consider to putting humanity on a sustainable trajectory. In the case of the Values of Biodiversity Assessment transformative change is mentioned twenty-eight times in the SPM alone, and transformative policy, decision-making, potential, & governance an extra six times. So, two more assessments from the IPBES mill put more questions about how these products integrate with each other, and, crucially, how they relate to policy development, implementation, and, ultimately, to the impact of IPBES.

Future assessments

Also, on the agenda was scoping for a new assessment on Business and Biodiversity. This new assessment will be methodological and is expected to be a rapid assessment—with presentation to plenary 12 in 2025 for final approval. It is a key step, designing an assessment to bring the business community closer to the biodiversity-related agreements, especially helping with achieving the 2050 target of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). The business community both effects, and is affected by, changes in biodiversity, positive

or negative. Key features of the assessment will be on approaches to measuring business dependencies and its impacts on biodiversity. The Business and Biodiversity Assessment will define how business are key actors of change; with the assessment charged with developing a palette of options for business adaptation to the ongoing biodiversity crisis. In questions of climate change much of the business world is already seized with the need to act, and act quickly. This new assessment should be the means to have business as key partners and change agents promoting positive changes towards a sustainable future.

There was a push for a possible new thematic assessment on Connectivity, with support from some Platform members also parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). The CMS-Secretariat see urgency in having such a rapid assessment to help with implementing key convention decisions. Plenary agreed that the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP), rather than the usual expert group, should prepare a scope for the next plenary (IPBES-10 to be held in the second half of 2023). This scoping by the MEP will be assisted through input from relevant multilateral environmental agreements (such as the CMS) and other organizations. The MEP will also be able to draw from already drafted elements for such a thematic assessment, work undertaken by the CMS, and the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Global Biodiversity Framework.

Again, looking to future assessments, there was agreement that a second global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services should be considered soon. The plenary invited the scientific community to accelerate knowledge acquisition for such a second global assessment, including work on filling the gaps identified in the first Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and other completed assessments of the Platform. Observers from the scientific community dryly commented that governments need to also provide the funding for such research to be done and that the current budgets of national and international funders for environmental and ecological research projects fall short of current needs.

The extensive work undertaken on a *Nature Futures Framework*, a scenario device to help frame forward thinking in assessments, was debated at great length. Eventually a revised version was accepted and should soon be available through the Platform's website (www.ipbes.net). The plenary particularly encouraged the scientific community to develop scenarios and models for biodiversity and ecosystem services for potential use in assessments by the Platform, addressing the gaps identified in the Methodological Assessment Report on Scenarios and Models of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. The considerable discussion on the *Nature Futures Framework* focussed on inclusion of different world views and linking more closely to the IPBES conceptual framework. The plenary also agreed to invite the scientific community and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities to discuss the opportunities and limits of, as well as test, the *Nature Futures Framework*. This brings scenario modelling into close contact with Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK), an important aspect of IPBES since inception.

Awareness of limited uptake of IPBES assessments across the policy community and wider civic society was reflected in a discussion on factsheets to be produced from assessments. The IPBES communications team together with the authors of some assessments, notably Sustainable Use of Wild Species, the Values of Biodiversity, and the still to be completed Invasive Alien Species Assessment, will draft factsheets targeting a range of user groups, e.g., policymakers, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, businesses, and the general public. As with all IPBES products, factsheets will not be made public until summaries for policymakers are approved and will provide a link to the underlying summary and assessment. At IPBES-10, the taskforce will report on the process used to

develop such factsheets and will provide advice on the preparation of versions for additional user groups. It will be interesting to get insights in the process and impact of these factsheets also with a view to planning the development of future factsheets and assessing their impact, while taking into consideration additional suggestions by platform members. IPBES-10 will then make a final decision on whether to make factsheets a part of IPBES communications.

Other issues

A range of other issues were discussed but more of an organisational kind that IPBES, as a decadal body, begins to accumulate. One that will be important is a further review of the Platform, which will have a range of issues to traverse. None more so than views expressed by some delegates that they were not comfortable to extend the timing of the discussions, so in the future more efforts need to focus on discussing fewer items in more depth, without simply exhausting delegates and authors. Working late into the night has become an unfortunate feature of intergovernmental processes, so it is vital IPBES tries to avoid that trap as much as possible to provide the quality work it aims for. A recurring issue is also the locality (and time zone) of IPBES plenaries. Plenaries that do not have a platform member offering to host must be held at the seat of the secretariat, i.e. Bonn, with generous support from the German government. These arrangements disadvantage observer organisations and delegations from distant time zones or with long travel times. Even the online format, if the meeting is in central Europe, cannot reduce the inconvenience for those participants in the western Americas or eastern Asia and Pacific. In future, it is to be hoped that non-European member states show willingness to host plenaries, providing an opportunity of exchange with their national organisations. In this regard that IPBES-10 will be held in Madison, USA, is welcome.

Future challenges

Despite the impressive pile of assessments after 10 years, the relentless negative trends of biodiversity continue, showing the hoped-for impact of the assessments, and the accumulated knowledge of the thousands of studies supporting them, has not yet been realised. But to do so also requires the biodiversity-related agreements and conventions to deliver, and, crucially, governments to implement nationally those decisions they agreed on globally. Inger Andersen, UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, recalled in her opening statement that IPBES needs to strike a balance between scientific assessments and uptake in real-world decision making, and needs to continue to take steps in interagency collaboration. The latter are inevitable, as climate change, biodiversity loss and societal issues are closely linked (Schmeller et al. 2020; Schmeller 2022).

The systematic challenges in a process like IPBES are enormous, as the diverse facets of biodiversity loss have multiple origins and are thus more complex than the problems from climate change. A welcome development is the growing together of IPBES and IPCC work. Even for climate change, despite its longer and more visible public exposure, effecting real change has been very slow due to national interests and priorities (Ripple et al. 2021). The slow negotiation pace again shown at IPBES-9 contradicts the urgency under which we need to act. We do indeed need a rapid transformative change towards

sustainability—and recall to our readership that we are still accepting submissions to the Special Issue on Transformative Change (<https://www.springer.com/journal/10531/updates/19682276>) (Schmeller and Bridgewater 2021).

Author contributions Both authors PB and DSS co-wrote and edited the editorial.

Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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