A guide to IPBES plenary meetings for new observers

provided by the Open-Ended Network of IPBES Stakeholders

Content

Background

This guide aims to provide delegates of stakeholder organisations with **basic information about IPBES plenary meetings**. It outlines the necessary steps to become an accredited observer organisation to the plenary, gives tips on how to prepare for negotiations, and explains how decisions are made. Volunteers from various stakeholder organisations developed this guide prior to the fourth IPBES plenary meeting based on their experience as observers during previous IPBES plenary meetings and publicly available information provided by the IPBES secretariat. This guide is a living document, updated regularly according to available resources.

Should you have content proposals for this guide, please feel free to contact the group of authors: ipbes-engagement-network@googlegroups.com .

How to participate in IPBES plenary meetings?

Accreditation as an observer organisation

To participate in IPBES plenary meetings, stakeholder organisations must be accepted as an "observer" by the platform. As of IPBES-4 (IPBES/4/INF/23), about 160 observers were accepted based on an interim procedure for the admission of observers (IPBES/1/12, Annex II). 115 additional organisations are recommended as new observers for IPBES-5 (see the complete list: IPBES/5/INF/21).

The rules for the admission of observers are still not finalized and will be subject to discussion during IPBES-5. A draft procedure was presented for consideration by the plenary (IPBES/5/14). According to this draft, organisations accepted as observers to the first IPBES plenary meeting do not need to reapply.

Organisations should indicate their interest in becoming observers to the IPBES secretariat **at least three months** prior to the upcoming plenary meeting and submit the requested information (address, contact person, mandate, scope and governing structure of the organisation, competences and interest relate to IPBES matters etc.).

Based on this information, the IPBES Bureau (elected representatives of IPBES member states with an administrative advisory role) will review the application and decide if an organisation should be recommended as a new observer to the plenary or not. Rejected applications are often due to organisations providing insufficient information and/or failing to show how their work is related to IPBES.

The IPBES Bureau can only *recommend* new observers; member states still have to accept and approve applications in plenary. Two veto options are still under discussion: new observers are accepted 1) as long as no member state of the platform objects, or 2) unless at least one third of the member states present at the meeting object.

Registration to IPBES plenary meetings

Once the stakeholder organisation is accredited as an 'observer', its delegates can register to attend IPBES plenary meetings. The IPBES Executive Secretary will invite member states, observers, and stakeholders to register about 3-4 months prior to each plenary meeting. **Registration is online** and needs to be accompanied by an official nomination letter by the observer organisation.

Participation in IPBES plenary meetings as an individual

Interested individuals not affiliated to an organisation with observer status should contact accredited organisations in their region or field of expertise (see the above mentioned list of observers IPBES/5/INF/21). One of these organisations might be willing to include additional people in their delegation. The IPBES open-ended network of stakeholders might also be able to facilitate contact to such organisations: ipbes-engagement-network@googlegroups.com

How to prepare for IPBES plenary meetings?

Plenary Agenda

One of the first documents published on the **IPBES plenary website** is the **provisional agenda with annotations**, which provides an overview of topics to be discussed and decisions to be made by the plenary (IPBES/5/1/Add.1). The IPBES secretariat also provides a report on the work programme's implementation status (IPBES/5/2).

Practical information about the meeting and the meeting venue will be found in the **Information note for delegates**.

IPBES Documents

The following set of documents will be prepared before and during the plenary:

Working documents: The IPBES plenary will discuss a list of working documents during the meeting. Advanced versions of working documents are made available 4-6 weeks ahead of the plenary in English in pdf and word format on the **IPBES plenary website** (http://www.ipbes.net/plenary/ipbes-5). They are prepared by the IPBES secretariat and provide condensed information and background for negotiations and decision-making. Documents often refer to related information documents (see below) that include further detailed material. Final versions of working documents are translated in all six UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish), and are updated on the IPBES plenary website within a short period of time before the plenary. They are numbered as *IPBES/PlenaryNumber/DocumentNumber*.

Information documents (INF): The IPBES secretariat posts in-depth background information related to specific thematic items. Documents are made available as they come in and are only available in a single language (English in most cases). Documents are numbered as *IPBES/PlenaryNumber/INF/DocumentNumber*.

In-session Documents: Working documents will be modified according to the progress on negotiations **during** plenary and made available by the IPBES secretariat on a dedicated in-session website (http://www.ipbes.net/plenary/ipbes-5/insession/ipbes-5). To stay informed, please check this website regularly during plenary meetings.

Non-Papers: Discussion papers capturing **different views and comments** from plenary statements are tabled by the IPBES secretariat or chairs of working/contact groups for consideration in the ongoing negotiation process.

Conference Room Paper (CRP): Draft decision documents are prepared by the IPBES secretariat **after consultation in working groups or contact groups** for further consideration by the plenary (see more details on the groups below).

Legal Documents (L-Documents): Final negotiated decision documents that contain **agreed text for adoption in plenary**. However, minor text changes can be proposed until the very last moment and need to be agreed upon in the plenary.

Decisions: Once member states approve L-Documents in the plenary, they becomes a decision and are posted in the six UN languages on the IPBES website. Decisions are numbered *IPBES-Plenary-Number/Decision-Number*.

After the plenary, the IPBES secretariat issues a **Meeting Report** that captures discussions and negotiations and the final decisions taken. The report is also provided with the preparatory documents for the next plenary.

Information and communication during plenary sessions

Interpretation: Interpretation in all six UN languages is available during the plenary sessions. Interpretation will also be available for some items discussed in the contact groups at IPBES-5 (see IPBES/5/1/Add.1, Item 2, a), 6.).

Daily coverage of negotiations and events: The IPBES secretariat has requested the Reporting Service of the non-profit organization International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) to cover the IPBES plenary meetings. Rapporteurs from IISD will participate in most of the public meetings and might also interview delegates and stakeholders. Daily IISD coverage of the meeting will be made available at: http://www.iisd.ca.

Live stream: Starting with Stakeholder Day, the IPBES secretariat will provide for the first time a live stream from the plenary sessions. Work and discussions happening in break-out groups during the Stakeholder Day as well as negotiations in contact groups during IPBES-5 will not be streamed. Check IPBES website (http://www.ipbes.net/webcast-ipbes-5) for instructions. A recording of the live-link will be made available after the event.

Social media: You can receive the latest information from the IPBES secretariat by following them on Twitter http://twitter.com/IPBES or Facebook https://www.facebook.com/IPBES/. Use #IPBES5 or @IPBES for your own tweets. We do not recommend tweeting details from ongoing negotiations in contact groups.

How to engage with other observer organisations?

IPBES Stakeholder Day(s)

Ahead of each plenary, the IPBES secretariat convenes the IPBES Stakeholder Day(s) in collaboration with stakeholders. The aim is to provide stakeholders with an update of IPBES progress, an opportunity to interact with the secretariat, members of the Bureau and experts involved in assessments, and allows for discussions on how stakeholders can become more involved and better contribute to the IPBES work programme. The agenda of IPBES-5 Stakeholder Day is available at: http://www.ipbes.net/ipbes-5-stakeholder-day .

In contrast to IPBES plenaries, participation in Stakeholder Day(s) **is not restricted** to IPBES member states and accredited observers: it is open to all interested individuals. Formal registration is however necessary to enable follow-up on participation, calibrate the venue (meals, rooms, etc.) and ensure security. To register for IPBES-5 Stakeholder Day, go to the following website: http://www.ipbes.net/eform/submit/ipbes-5-stakeholder-day .

Get engaged! The Stakeholder Day prior to IPBES-5 includes a **session where stakeholder initiatives that support the IPBES work programme will be showcased** (depending on available time). Examples from stakeholders participating in the meeting or following the live-stream will be collected using the template available here: http://www.ipbes.net/ipbes-5-stakeholder-day .

Break-out groups are also set to discuss specific IPBES deliverables and processes in more detail. Stakeholders who would like to make a proposal for a specific topic should contact the organizers in advance (IPBES5stakeholderday@iucn.org) or as soon as possible on-site.

One outcome of the Stakeholder Day will be a **joint statement** drafted by participants and delivered during the opening session of the IPBES-5 plenary. Elements for this statement will be collected during the day (survey of participants during breaks). A group of volunteers will use these elements to draft a statement from stakeholders to the plenary. Every stakeholder is welcome to join the drafting group.

Stakeholders are also welcome to **join the organizing team** for future Stakeholder Day(s). Please note that this participation is made on a voluntary basis (in-kind contribution) - there is no financing linked to this participation.

Consultations during the plenary sessions

Since IPBES-3, IPBES provides a room for accredited stakeholders (observers) to consult and coordinate during plenary sessions. The group of coordinated stakeholders will meet every morning ahead of the plenary to discuss the status of negotiations and potential statements on specific agenda items. Meeting time will be announced accordingly. Stakeholders attending as observers are invited to participate in these regular stakeholder coordination meetings. The group of 'coordinated stakeholders' may also have a microphone assigned for joint interventions and joint statements during the plenary session.

Meetings of early career scientists during the plenary

A group of early career scientists formed the Biodiversity-Science-Policy-Interface Network – BSPIN during the second IPBES plenary. BSPIN is an international and interdisciplinary network of currently 90 early career scientists (ECS) interested in engaging in science-policy interfaces (SPIs) related to global environmental politics. BSPIN's mission is to **link young scholars interested in SPI processes and to improve their capacities** to actively engage in them.

BSPIN will **organize a workshop** for interested scientists prior to IPBES-5 on Sunday 5 March 2017. The workshop programme and further information about the network are available at: http://www.biodiversity.de/en/bspin-earlycareer .

BSPIN will also be facilitating meetings of early career scientists during the IPBES plenary week to exchange views and information and discuss ongoing negotiations. To join the network, send an email to contact.bspin@gmail.com or visit its facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/biodivspis

How does a IPBES plenary meeting work?

The plenary sessions

Plenary meetings are the assemblies of the IPBES member states and the decision-making body of the platform facilitated by the IPBES secretariat with support from the Bureau and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) (see explanation of the IPBES bodies below). **A meeting of the IPBES plenary includes plenary sessions, assemblies of all present member states and observers, and negotiations in sub-groups (so-called contact groups).** The plenary sessions are chaired by the chair of the IPBES Bureau and its co-chairs (see the http://www.ipbes.net/about/organisation/bureau for the sitting Bureau members).

Only representatives from stakeholder organisations that are accredited as observers are allowed to participate in the plenary session (see also chapter on observer accreditation above). A list of registered member states and observer delegations is available on the plenary website (List of IPBES-5 participants).

The agenda for the 5th plenary can be found at http://www.ipbes.net/plenary/ipbes-5. Plenary sessions usually take place from 10h00 - 13h00 and 15h00-18h00 with the possibility of evening sessions (usually 19h30 - 23h00).

The plenary will start with an opening session and welcome addresses by the Executive Secretary, the host government and representatives from UN organisations. It is common practice that a representative of each UN region provides an opening statement, followed by international organisations and NGOs. During the past years, the chair of the plenary also invited opening statements from the participants of the Stakeholder Day(s) as well as from representatives of indigenous peoples and local community organisations (IPLCs). It is in the

responsibility of the chair to allow further statements or interventions by observer organisations.

The plenary session will continue with progress reports on the implementation of the first IPBES work programme before it breaks into contact groups where the IPBES member states discuss agenda items in detail. Contact groups can only make proposals for decision text. Final decisions are made in plenary.

Observer interventions in plenary sessions

According to the rules of IPBES, 'any observer may, **upon the invitation of the chair**, participate in the plenary **without the ability to cast votes or join or block consensus'** (Rules of Procedure, Decision IPBES-1/1, Rule 7). The chair of the plenary session can also decide to give observer organisations the opportunity to provide a statement or an intervention during the opening and/or the closing of the plenary and/or on a specific agenda item. The chair might decide to give the floor only to national delegations and not allow statements from observers due to time restrictions.

Interventions should be brief and concise and the chair will usually allow no more than two minutes of speech. Statements should be submitted to the plenary secretariat in advance or directly after the speech and will be published as a conference document on in-session IPBES webpages.

The chair will announce the agenda item under discussion and ask for comments and interventions. Usually the chair will give the floor to speakers in the following order:

- representatives of member states or regional groups
- representatives of collaborative partners (e.g. UNEP, UNDP, FAO, UNESCO)
- representatives of strategic partners like biodiversity related conventions (e.g. CBD etc.)
- representatives of international observer organisations (e.g. IUCN, ICSU, Future Earth, etc.)
- representatives of other observer organisations (indigenous peoples and local community organisations - IPLCs, business, group of coordinated stakeholders, other stakeholder organisations)

To ask for the floor, representatives and observers have to press the speak button on the microphone they were assigned besides their name tag. Nametags should not be moved since they are linked to a specific microphone to allow the chair to identify on his/her monitor who is asking for the floor. The chair will give the floor to representatives in the order they have requested to speak or in the order presented above. It is also common practise at plenary meetings for representatives wishing to speak to hold the organisation's name tag upright in front of them to give a signal to the chair and the camera operator.

Observer organisations holding a strategic partnership agreement with the IPBES secretariat will have a specific nametag (e.g. IUCN). Nametags for observer groups, such as 'Education' or 'IPLC', will usually be provided as well as a nametag for the 'Stakeholder' group in a specific row of the meeting room. Microphones will be identified by numbers, not names.

The chair is more likely to accept an intervention during the plenary from stakeholders if they provide a coordinated statement and inform the chair in advance about their intention to speak.

The stakeholder delegate who presents the intervention should identify himself and the agenda item he wishes to comment on.

What are contact groups?

At IPBES-5, three contact groups will discuss a subset of agenda items. Contact groups 1 and 2 will meet in parallel while group 3 will meet during the contact groups' breaks.

Contact group 1	Contact group 2
• 6 (b) indigenous and local knowledge systems • 8 review of the Platform • 9 planning for future sessions of the Plenary • 2 (b) status of the membership of the Platform • pending items	• 6 (d) methodological assessment regarding the diverse conceptualization of multiple values of nature and its benefits and the thematic assessments on invasive alien species (e) and the sustainable use of biodiversity (f) • 6 (a) capacity-building • 6 (g) policy support tools and methodologies • pending items
Contact group 3	
• 7 financial and budgetary arrangements	

Open and closed contact groups: Contact group sessions during IPBES plenary meetings are generally open to observers. However, the chair of the contact group may decide to hold a contact group meeting **without observers**. In this case, only delegates from member states and delegates from observer organisations specifically invited to join are allowed to participate in the meeting.

Observer intervention in contact group sessions

The rules regarding observer interventions in plenary sessions (observers can only make statements when the session chair gives them the floor) are also applicable in contact groups. Observers can only comment on an item and suggest text changes, but **they cannot request text changes**.

Only delegates of member state delegations are authorized to propose amendments to IPBES documents. Experts (MEP members, report authors or the IPBES secretariat) may be asked by member states' delegates to provided further information. All member states have to agree on final amendments. Text changes suggested by stakeholders need to be taken up and supported by member states to be included in the final text. Observers should inform the chair prior to the session that they would like to present a statement on a specific item.

Sharing information from contact groups: During contact groups at IPBES-5, comments and text changes presented by delegates should not be shared publicly. **Reporting/tweeting on the ongoing negotiations is not recommended.**

Contact group sessions on the budget

Results from the negotiations in the **contact group on budget** are crucial for the IPBES process. IPBES needs to raise additional funding to be able to implement the work programme agreed on at IPBES-2 or the plenary will have to decide how to reduce the workload and/or drop some of the planned assessments. The contact group on the budget will discuss where cuts could be made and present a proposal to the plenary.

How are decisions made in IPBES plenary sessions?

The plenary is the assembly of the member states and the decision-making body of IPBES. All decisions on matters of substance have to reach a consensus. If member states cannot agree on an issue, text is often put in square brackets and tabled for discussion at a later stage (in the relevant contact group or plenary). In case of disagreement on text, i.e. when a consensus is not reached, the plenary might postpone the negotiations and send the text back for further development by the MEP and the Bureau.

The plenary will make decisions (see paragraph below), approve deliverables and agree on negotiated text as well as on IPBES reports according to the **Rules of Procedure** (IPBES-1/1) and the **Procedures for the preparation of Platform deliverables** (IPBES-3/3). Intensity and scope of negotiations vary greatly both within documents and across documents. The following procedure for the preparation and **clearance of IPBES deliverables** have been adopted by plenary in decision IPBES-3/3, Annex 1, 1.3, 2. - 4. (IPBES-3/3; http://www.ipbes.net/policies-and-procedures):

"Validation" of the Platform's reports is a process by which the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and the Bureau provide their endorsement that the processes for the preparation of Platform reports have been duly followed.

"Acceptance" of the Platform's reports at a session of the Plenary signifies that the material has not been subjected to section-by-section or line-by-line discussion and agreement by the Plenary but nevertheless presents a comprehensive and balanced view of the subject matter.

"Adoption" of the Platform's reports is a process of section-by-section (and not line-by-line) endorsement, as described in section 3.9, at a session of the Plenary.

"Approval" of the Platform's summaries for policymakers signifies that the material has been subject to detailed, line-by-line discussion and agreement by consensus at a session of the Plenary.

"Preliminary acceptance, adoption and approval" of regional reports will be undertaken by the relevant regional representatives at a session of the Plenary, and such reports will then be further reviewed and may be accepted, adopted and approved by the Plenary as a whole.

Clearance processes for Platform deliverables				
Platform deliverables	*Validation*	*Acceptance*	*Adoption*	*Approval*
Assessments				
• Thematic and methodological assessment reports (based on standard or fast-track approach)	MEP/Bureau	Plenary	N/A	N/A
• Thematic and methodological assessment SPMs (based on standard or fast-track approach)	MEP/Bureau	N/A	N/A	Plenary
• Regional/subregional assessment reports	MEP/Bureau	Plenary	N/A	N/A
• Regional/subregional assessment SPMs	MEP/Bureau	N/A	N/A	Plenary
• Global assessment reports	MEP/Bureau	Plenary	N/A	N/A
• Global assessment SPMs	MEP/Bureau	N/A	N/A	Plenary
Synthesis reports	MEP/Bureau	N/A	Plenary	N/A
Synthesis SPMs	MEP/Bureau	N/A	N/A	Plenary
Technical summaries	MEP/Bureau	Plenary	N/A	N/A
Technical papers	MEP/Bureau	Authors and MEP	N/A	N/A
Supporting materials	MEP/Bureau	N/A	N/A	N/A

Abbreviations: MEP, Multidisciplinary Expert Panel; N/A, not applicable; SPM, summary for policymakers.

The plenary can also recognise and highlight certain issues on the agenda by using particular expressions that carry different weight. The weakest expression is to '**take note'** of a report or process. The plenary can also **'welcome'** a document or decision, if the member states agree with the content. It can also '**invite'** members or stakeholder organisations to implement activities in the future or '**encourage'** them, if the need for action should be highlighted. The plenary can '**requests'** its bodies e.g. IPBES secretariat or the MEP to carry out certain activities. The strongest formulation the plenary can use in its decision text is to '**urge'** its members to act. However, this still does not mean that this decision is binding for the member states.

Election of experts for the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) and the Bureau: Only IPBES member states are authorized to **propose and elect members of the MEP**, according to decision IPBES-1/1 and IPBES-2/1 and the Guidelines for the nomination and selection of MEP members. To ensure continuity in the work of the MEP, not all 25 MEP members (5 per UN region) will be replaced after one term. At IPBES-5, four members of the MEP (one alternate from the Latin American region, two from the Eastern European region, and one from the African region) will be replaced.

Member states are asked to propose candidates taking into account disciplines and gender balance. Member states can nominate as many candidates as they wish. However, it is common practice that countries of each UN region agree on joint candidates before the election takes place in the plenary session.

The plenary also elects the **members of the IPBES Bureau** including the chair of the platform. Members of the Bureau, two per UN region, are elected for a three-year term. The current Bureau members were elected at IPBES-4.

What happens between IPBES plenary meetings?

The IPBES secretariat organises the implementation of the plenary decisions in between IPBES plenary meetings, the **so-called inter-sessional process**, which is overseen by the IPBES Bureau. The IPBES secretariat is supported by the Technical Support Units (TSUs) for the different deliverables and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel.

In case that the plenary approves a scoping for or the undertaking of a new thematic or methodological assessment, the IPBES secretariat will publish a call for nomination of experts for the respective assessment.

Ongoing work on already approved assessments will continue and expert groups will consult and meet during the year to develop draft reports. The development process of (most) assessment reports includes public online reviews where experts are invited to provide comments and recommendations on the drafts.

As soon as the plenary adopts a final synthesis report or approves a Summary for Policy Makers (SPM), it is published online. It can take a few months before the edited version of a report is released and outreach and dissemination activities are organized.

To receive the latest information e.g. on review processes or calls for experts, stakeholders should sign-up to the IPBES newsletter: http://www.ipbes.net/newsletter-signup .
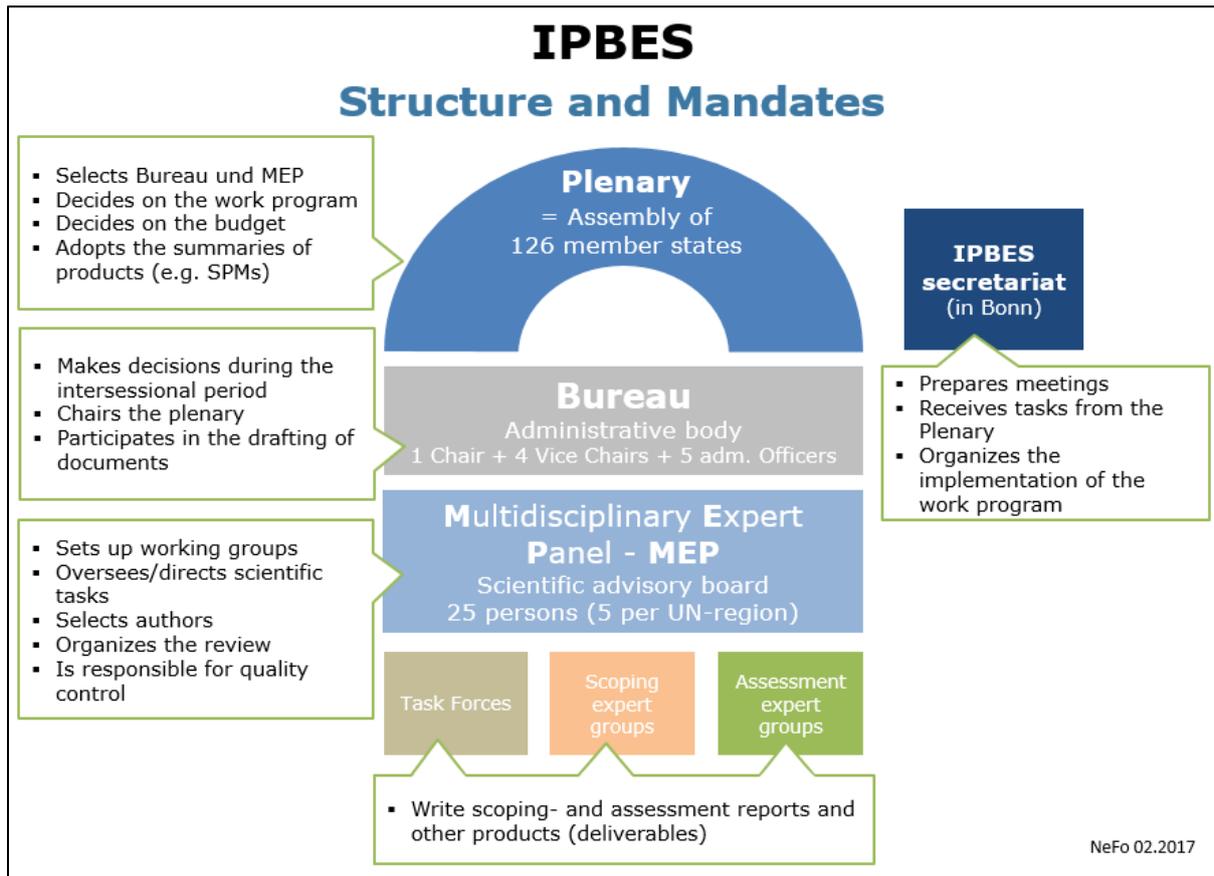
What are the IPBES bodies?

The following image provides an overview of the IPBES bodies and its most important functions. A detailed description of the IPBES process, its bodies, and their functions can be found in the 'Conceptual framework' (Decision IPBES-2/4), in the document 'Functions, operating principles and institutional arrangements of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services' and on the IPBES website.

This concludes the brief overview of information for observers attending the IPBES plenary. We hope this guide has provided you with all the information you need to find your way around IPBES-5 and helps facilitate your future IPBES activities.

For further general information on IPBES, please have a look at the IPBES website (ipbes.net) or material provided by stakeholders for example the guide by giz (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH) and NeFo (German Network-Forum for Biodiversity Research):
The Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) - A brief introduction for scientists, policy makers, and practitioners.

IPBES
Structure and Mandates

Plenary
= Assembly of
126 member states

- Selects Bureau und MEP
- Decides on the work program
- Decides on the budget
- Adopts the summaries of products (e.g. SPMs)

IPBES secretariat (in Bonn)

- Prepares meetings
- Receives tasks from the Plenary
- Organizes the implementation of the work program

Bureau
Administrative body
1 Chair + 4 Vice Chairs + 5 adm. Officers

- Makes decisions during the intersessional period
- Chairs the plenary
- Participates in the drafting of documents

Multidisciplinary Expert Panel - MEP
Scientific advisory board
25 persons (5 per UN-region)

- Sets up working groups
- Oversees/directs scientific tasks
- Selects authors
- Organizes the review
- Is responsible for quality control

Task Forces | Scoping expert groups | Assessment expert groups

- Write scoping- and assessment reports and other products (deliverables)

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(Source: German Network-Forum for Biodiversity Research – NeFo, 2017)