



1.2. OEWG Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals, waste, and pollution prevention.

Accredited Major Group Stakeholder Statement

Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC)

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The Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) considers that an integrated, holistic approach is essential if we are to effectively manage chemicals in the environment. This is particularly important when considering the impact of chemicals on natural capital, including biodiversity, throughout their life cycle, and the resulting consequences for the environment and human health. We believe that the scope of the science-policy to contribute to the sound management of chemicals, waste, and pollution prevention (SPP CWP) needs to be chemical-focused and risk-based. Prioritization must be transparent and based on the best available science, which may be informed by horizon scanning activities. The SPP CWP should have the agility to respond to emerging issues but scientific quality and rigor must not be compromised. The SPP CWP should also be mindful of the local impacts of global pollution challenges in assessments and that capacity building at a local level may be a mechanism to affect global change.

An holistic approach to assessments

To avoid subjectivity or ambiguity associated with the phrase ‘holistic approach’, a multi-disciplinary and iterative definition needs to be established. The integrated approach should incorporate socioeconomic and geopolitical factors influencing the impact of chemicals throughout their life cycle, as well as different environmental compartments and exposure pathways. Socioeconomic factors may include climate, development level and resource availability. Geopolitical factors may include consideration of the will and capacity to enact

chemical management and pollution control policies using scarce resources. We should be mindful that regulations are not often harmonized and have different levels of ambition, which could result in regional disadvantages for the implementation of recommendations. In addition, we should also recognize that resource limitations might sometimes make it challenging to consider the chemical life cycle as the broader focus of waste management. For example, there may be instances where a strong holistic or integrated action is challenged by resource availability. In such a situation, flexibility is key to future-proof the process (i.e., respond to emerging issues etc.), but too much flexibility could make the task unmanageable.

In SETAC's opinion, assessments should be holistic, include discussions of uncertainty and focus on solutions as well as problems, and it would be wise to learn from the approaches taken by other science-policy panels. We favor the IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services)/ GEO (Global Environmental Outcome) assessment model where science, impacts and response options are integrated rather than the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)/ Montreal Protocol assessment model where they are addressed separately. The objective of IPBES is to 'strengthen the science-policy interface' and it adopts a 'bottom-up' approach to define the work programme (stakeholders submit requests to a rolling work programme). The objective of the IPCC is to 'provide ... scientific information' and it adopts a top-down approach to define the work programme (the science-policy panel decides topics for each assessment cycle). The work of the SPP CWP is more akin to the IPCC (i.e., providing robust scientific evidence to policymakers), but a more bottom-up approach for setting the work programme may be desirable.

A chemical-focused scope

It is essential for the panel to have a clearly defined scope, and SETAC considers an 'open list' to be the most appropriate strategy. However, agreeing on what should be explicitly excluded in the scope may be problematic. We encourage a chemical focus and suggest exclusion of non-chemical pollution (noise, light, sediment, etc.), not because these are unimportant environmental stressors, but because the task is potentially overwhelming and must be constrained. We encourage the inclusion of all forms of chemical pollution and the adoption of a risk-based approach built on robust scientific evidence.

It is important to collaborate with existing bodies and to identify where the SPP CWP could have the greatest impact. It is unlikely that the SPP CWP will be able to support all potentially relevant multilateral environmental agreements and entities to the same degree, so using a mapping exercise to agree on a priority list would be helpful. The SPP CWP could support a harmonized approach to the sound management of chemicals, waste and pollution prevention by addressing gaps not filled by or addressed within existing international conventions. These international conventions often focus solely on select chemicals, or specific environmental outcomes that are impacted by chemicals, waste and pollution prevention issues. While this is mentioned in the 'identify multilateral environmental agreements...' step, SETAC would recommend that a greater emphasis on this point is included in the objective / scope / principles.

Prioritization must be transparent and based on scientific evidence

SETAC highlights the importance of prioritization and priority setting criteria as part of the conceptual framework. These priority-setting criteria will provide the justification for the topics the panel will address. The criteria must be clear and based on science, and must be applied consistently to all potentially relevant topics and value chains, in the space of chemicals, waste, and pollution. The criteria should be set during the inter-sessional period, and they should be agreed upon by the OEWG.

SETAC considers that the outputs from future horizon scanning activities will further identify and prioritize emerging issues and possible solutions. To achieve this, SETAC believes horizon scanning activities should be global and holistic and informed by the panel's scope and conceptual framework. SETAC has undertaken global horizon scanning workshops under the title of 'Towards Sustainable Environmental Quality'. The workshops were conducted in the society's five geographical areas (Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia Pacific and Africa) and the outputs were published in peer-reviewed journals and focused on priority research questions. This background may provide a useful starting point for future horizon scanning activities on key issues regarding the exposure and effects of environmental chemicals, and could be revisited to address specific SPP CWP topics.

Another consideration is the link to existing chemicals-related efforts (e.g., Minamata Convention, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, and the Montreal Protocol) as well as IPCC and IPBES. For example, is it feasible for chemical pollution considerations, as identified through horizon scanning, to be integrated/ connected with the activities and efforts of IPCC and IPBES? In addition, the outputs from horizon scanning can be used to inform the prioritization of activities and work programme development, in order to support the other functions of the science-policy panel.

If the OEWG decides that the horizon scanning and foresight process is appropriate, SETAC considers it essential for the secretariat to develop a proposal for the panel's approach and suggests that multidisciplinary experts are involved in the procedure. Since any horizon scanning/ foresight process will need careful management and clear oversight, we support the creation of a multidisciplinary expert group to scope out the possibilities.

Maintaining scientific rigor and the agility to respond to emerging issues is critical

SETAC believes that a multi-track approach is appropriate, assuming that there is sufficient capacity to undertake and manage multiple assessments simultaneously. However, in order to build trust in the assessments and create impact, it may be wise to do a smaller number of in-depth assessments rather than many superficial assessments. Quality, scientific rigor, and broad recognition should be the core assets of each assessment. 'Rapidly responding to emerging issues' is of secondary importance, but SETAC recognizes the need to pivot to address priority needs as they arise. To accommodate various tracks, a process could be developed for these 'hot topics' to be presented annually at the SPP CWP for assessment consideration, outside of the 'regular' workplan. This procedure would not drive the entire process, but would allow flexibility (with limitation).

SETAC wonders if the SPP CWP will have the capacity to take on the production of existing assessments considering the aforementioned limitations. There may be a link between the UNEP outlook documents and possible horizon scanning activities, and it would be sensible to share SPP CWP assessments with other bodies to maximize impact. SETAC expresses support for efforts to minimize duplication and ensure alignment/ a common narrative in outputs. However, it may be best to suspend exploration of this point until there is a clearer vision of the group's work programme and some experience of workload, and hence the capacity to take on additional activities. SETAC also wonders if a liaison role could be established, which means that the SPP CWP does not take on the development of the documents, but it does connect with the group(s) tasked with developing the documents to ensure connectivity.

Global issues have local impacts and solutions

SETAC considers a global perspective to be important, but without losing sight of the specific issues that might have highly significant local impacts. For example, many value chains are global and the use of chemicals in one part of the world can have major environmental impacts in other geographical regions. In contrast, impacts at the local/ regional level also need to be considered, especially in less developed/ resourced regions. Consequently, it is key to consider the intended impact early in the process to allocate (or find) resources, in order for tangible actions in the assessments to be implemented.

SETAC considers capacity building to be of critical importance if the SPP CWP is to make a difference globally. Developing a mechanism to facilitate connectivity and partnership with various groups is vital. SETAC has a framework that can bring this to the fore e.g., Special Sessions at our Annual Meetings (Europe, North America and Asia Pacific) and Biannual Meetings (Latin America and Africa), Interest Groups, horizon scanning, training courses, workshops, certification programme (IBERA) and other engagement activities with our membership. SETAC also has experience working collaboratively with other organizations and we have the capability and desire to do so to support the SPP CWP, and further develop our collaborative capacity.