

Comments by the European Union and its Member States

On the theme of UNEA-4

These comments respond to the 12 March Progress Update which reports the decision at the 27 February Joint Bureaux meeting to continue consideration of two thematic areas: Sustainable Consumption and Production, and Promoting Innovative Solutions to Environmental Challenges.

Key messages

- EU&MS warmly welcome the inclusion of Sustainable Consumption and Production. This was our preferred choice from the four previously considered. It remains our preference, for the reasons set out below.
- We recognise that innovation is highly important, but is not fit as a general theme for UNEA-4 given that it lacks agenda-setting value and action.
- EU&MS are happy that there is agreement that State of the Environment will be addressed during the GEO-6 agenda item and recall that in any case, it should underpin any UNEA theme.
- The 'guiding questions' newly proposed by the Secretariat in the Progress Update will be valuable in guiding the *presentation* and *communication* of the theme, and the preparations for UNEA more generally. We do not think they help *decide* the theme, because they do not provide a basis for differentiating between the two proposed themes, so we propose they can be more fruitfully addressed after the theme has been chosen. [We will comment separately on these questions and their application].
- If criteria are needed to further inform the choice of theme, the list proposed by the UNEA President at the start of this process, and endorsed at several subsequent stages, remains valid.

Promoting Innovative Solutions

- EU&MS do not support innovation as the overarching theme, because it is too broad, lacks agenda-setting action, and because it is undesirable to downgrade consideration of non innovative approaches.
- We previously argued that as a cross-cutting issue innovation should have prominence whatever theme is chosen. We noted that, out of the earlier candidates, it fits particularly well with SCP, and see this as a further advantage of SCP.
- The 23 February Secretariat Revised Note partially addresses this problem with its reference to 'reintroduce, based on indigenous knowledge former practices that make more sense today'. However this raises further problems. If the definition of 'innovation' includes rediscovery of the old, this makes the concept unclear and unable to define a coherent body of business for UNEA. It risks provoking sterile arguments about whether something is either 'new' or 'old' enough to qualify'
- Moreover, it would de-prioritise solutions which are already known, and just need fuller implementation. This would be regrettable, since in many fields better application of methods and solutions which are already tried and tested has huge potential benefits.

Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)

- EU&MS support SCP as the theme for UNEA-4. It follows on very well the pollution focus of UNEA-3 and will build on the review of SDG12 at the 2018 HLPF. .
- We would propose that SCP is adopted as the overall theme, but that it is framed so as to accommodate not only a prominent strand on innovation, but also relevant and congruent aspects of other proposed themes and topics, all of which had some merit.

- The rest of this LTT first sets out the advantages of SCP and then notes how it can accommodate other issues.

Advantages of Sustainable Consumption and Production

- It can embrace relevant perspectives and approaches including the circular economy, resource efficiency, innovation/innovative solutions including eco-innovation, and resources management.
- It follows on very well from the pollution focus of UNEA-3 and provides scope for action: SCP and the related approaches just mentioned are key methods for avoiding and reducing pollution at source and throughout the whole value chain.
- It enables UNEA to address other related topical issues such as plastics and marine plastic litter, antimicrobial resistance, water, forests and biodiversity (for example through the concept of natural capital or imported deforestation), resilience and restoration.
- Specifically, we will find it important for UNEA-4 to address the process toward a new regime for sound management of chemicals beyond 2020 (Johannesburg and SDG target 12.4)
- UNEA-4 should also address the implementation of the new 2018-2022 strategy of the 10YFP and build on the UNEA-2 resolution.
- SCP is highly interdisciplinary encompassing economic, social and environmental dimensions in an integrated manner, supporting the cross-cutting implementation of the SDGs. According to the International Resource Panel (IRP), achieving 12 out of 17 SDGs depend on achieving greater resource efficiency. Moreover, UNEA4 will follow the review of SDG12 that will take place in 2018 and the discussion at the HLPF in 2018.
- SCP is also crucial for a number of mitigation strategies and, as stressed by the IRP, it has to be an integral part of climate policy. Resource efficiency supports the sustainability, innovation and decarbonisation of our food systems, water, extractive industries, energy sector, and livelihoods.
- It warrants UNEA attention because, unlike many other important environmental topics, it does not have a 'global home'.
- SCP fosters solutions, innovation and broad partnerships. It has strong potential to mobilise not only Ministers, but also significant attention from the private sector and civil society. It also resonates very well with citizens in their role as consumers.

Accommodating other themes and issues

- **Innovation:** SCP calls for innovation not only in technologies but also in institutions, behaviours, incentives. It opens up a rich field for innovation without, however, prejudicing non innovative responses;
- **Nature and biodiversity:** SCP offers ways to prevent and reduce human impacts on nature and biodiversity;
- **Food and agriculture:** food production and distribution systems, imported deforestation and food waste reduction, reuse and recovery are now important and topical priorities for SCP approaches;
- **Water:** SCP is critical to a resilient and equitable response to water quality threats, degradation of water-based ecosystems, water stress and insecurity, all of which are exacerbated by climate change. As we have previously noted, this is an important and timely opportunity to continue and develop international action on water;
- **Environmental security:** SCP has a central role in improving resilience and secure livelihoods, including in food and water as just mentioned;
- **Evidence and data:** better environmental information and new ways of framing human / environment interactions such as natural capital and footprint have an integral role in guiding SCP.

Food and Nature

We note that 'No support was expressed in the context of the joint bureaux for the third thematic area (Food and Nature) proposed by the Secretariat.' If this theme is discussed further, we would reiterate our previous view, as follows.

- We also see merit in Food and Nature provided discussions can provide reassurance that it can add value to other international biodiversity initiatives around the same time, and engage agricultural interests satisfactorily despite the unusually short preparation time for UNEA 4
 - This theme could have valuable benefits. It is a helpful framing of important issues; highly topical; may easily engage Ministers and the wider public;
 - It brings out the links between several SDGs, and would enable UNEA to address many issues including water, forests, agriculture, agro-ecology, pesticides, fertilizers, land use, land degradation, protection of endangered species/illegal trade in wildlife and marine pollution.
 - We welcome the emphasis on resilience.
 - The theme can also embrace circular economy, resources management, natural capital, conservation and restoration.
 - It would be important to ensure that:
 - o Coverage avoids conflict with CBD work and competences, and can contribute in a complementary manner to the negotiations related to the post 2020 biodiversity framework.
 - o It should be clear how UNEA-4 would actually add value to other international high level discussions on biodiversity in 2018 and 2019.
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