

Biodiversity: Global policy needs scientific approach

In correspondence published in the latest edition of *Nature*, CSIRO researchers have progressed the debate about the role of the new [Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\)](#).



Credit: ScienceImage

The correspondence – written by [Dr David Westcott](#), [Dr Frederieke Kroon](#) and [Dr Andy Sheppard](#) – is a response to an earlier comment in *Nature* ([‘Conservation policy: Listen to the voices of experience’](#)) from a group headed by lead author Esther Turnhout from Wageningen University in the Netherlands.

That group proposed some 'rules of engagement' for the IPBES and urged that lessons be learned from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). They argued that, to avoid the sorts of controversies that have plagued the IPCC, the IPBES should give equal prominence to 'monetary, aesthetic and sacred values' in 'policy discussions of what biodiversity and ecosystems offer to humans'.

That prompted the CSIRO scientists to send their communication, [‘Policy: Biodiversity needs a scientific approach’](#). They began by acknowledging that 'IPBES should take citizen knowledge and non-monetary values into account to improve the science-policy interface for biodiversity protection', as already recognised in the 'Generation of Knowledge' IPBES function.

However, they also pointed out that 'knowledge used to inform policy must be produced through an objective process if it is to withstand scrutiny, and this demands a science-based approach'.

They added that science 'provides a common currency for understanding the consequences ... of actions arising from the values of different stakeholders', and that it is up to society to define which values are most important.

According to the CSIRO scientists, such an objective approach is critical to ensure the credibility of biodiversity data,

assessment processes and the IPBES platform itself. So, rather than identifying strategies to avoid the controversies that the IPCC has encountered, the CSIRO scientists argue for 'mechanisms for successful negotiation of such controversies to support transformation'.

The IPBES was created in April 2012 with 93 member states, including Australia. United Nations Member partners include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The first meeting of the IPBES' Plenary will be held in Germany in January 2013. The meeting will 'aim to agree on the remaining rules of procedures for the meetings of the platform, consider other rules of procedure for the platform, elect ... Expert Panel members, and agree on the next steps by which the IPBES work programme can become operational'.

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