

Our ref.: 5221-21/IPCC/AR6

Annex(es): 1

To designated IPCC Focal Points and
Ministries of Foreign Affairs
(if no focal point has been designated)

COPY

Geneva, 14 October 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of the Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) I am addressing you on the subject of the Fifty-fifth Session of the IPCC and of the Twelfth Session of Working Group II as well as the Fifty-sixth Session of the IPCC and the Fourteenth Session of Working Group III.

At the Fifty-fourth Session of the IPCC (26 July – 6 August 2021), the Panel was informed by the Secretariat that a consultation will be conducted to solicit the views from IPCC Focal Points regarding the format of the Fifty-fifth Session of the IPCC and of the Twelfth Session of Working Group II during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As per the current [Strategic Planning Schedule](#), the approval of the Working Group II report is currently scheduled for 14-18 February 2022 and will be hosted by Germany. The Working Group III approval session is planned for 21-25 March 2022 and will be hosted by the United Kingdom.

In fulfilling its mandate of supporting and organizing sessions for the IPCC, the Secretariat in consultation with Working Group II and Working Group III have identified potential formats for the approval sessions. Given the proximity of the sessions, the Working Groups and Secretariat intend to harmonise meeting arrangements as closely as possible, optimizing the conditions for both approval sessions for the benefit of all participants while building on the experience from the Working Group I approval session. The possible considerations for the two upcoming approval sessions are outlined in the attached consultation paper.

You are kindly invited to submit your views on the format of the sessions on official letterhead to the IPCC Secretariat by **Wednesday 27 October 2021**. The Secretariat will upload all the submissions from the Governments in the IPCC Focal Point Portal: <https://apps.ipcc.ch/fp/> which will facilitate an informed decision on the format of the sessions.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this matter and your support in these challenging times.

A copy of this letter is being sent for information to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to the Permanent Representatives from your country to the World Meteorological Organization and to the United Nations Environment Programme.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a small 'M' and a checkmark-like flourish.

(Abdalah Mokssit)
Secretary of the IPCC

Consultation paper

Format of the approval sessions of the WG II and WG III contributions to the IPCC AR6

Background

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic¹, IPCC had already adjusted its calendar of activities and mode of work and as such has recently² conducted successfully the approval of the Working Group I (WG I) contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), its first virtual approval session. With the WG I report completed with minimum delay IPCC demonstrated that a timely completion of the AR6 is feasible.

As per the current [Strategic Planning Schedule](#) the approval of the Working Group II (WG II) report is currently scheduled for 14-18 February 2022 and will be hosted by Germany. The Working Group III (WG III) approval session is planned for 21-25 March 2022 and will be hosted by the United Kingdom. A successful and timely approval of the WG II and WG III reports is key to ensuring that the SYR is delivered as scheduled, and that the AR6 informs the global stocktake scheduled to take place in 2022-2023.

Proposed approach

Recognising the close proximity of the two sessions, WG II and WG III intend to harmonise meeting arrangements as closely as possible, optimizing the conditions for both approval sessions for the benefit of all participants while building on the experience from the WGI approval session.

According to Decision IPCC-LIII(bis)-2 the arrangements taken for the 14th Session of Working Group I and the 54th Session of the IPCC do not set a precedent for future virtual sessions; however, it is noted that those exceptional circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic that informed the Panel's decision at LIII(bis) have not changed, with delegations and experts still affected by the same constraints around a physical meeting that would be to the detriment of compliance with the IPCC's standards regarding transparency, inclusiveness and equal opportunity in the session.

IPCC Secretariat in consultation with WG II and WG III have identified the following three potential formats for the approval sessions:

1. A physical meeting, with all delegations attending in-person at a single location
2. A virtual meeting, with all delegations participating through an online platform
3. A hybrid meeting combining elements of the above

They were assessed against the criteria/standards of:

- Inclusiveness – means in this case, that all delegations can participate, irrespective of constraints associated with the COVID-19 pandemic
- Equal opportunity – means in this case, that while participating, the arrangements of the meeting did not favour or disfavour any delegation
- Transparency – means in this case, that all session activities are well understood, held in clear view, with accountability at every stage

¹ [Decision IPCC-LIII\(bis\)-2.2 AR6 Strategic Planning Schedule](#)

² [Fourteenth Session of Working Group I and Fifty-Fourth Session of the IPCC — IPCC](#)

In addition, the assessment took into account the following considerations:

- Risk to participants from COVID-19 infection
- Workload and recovery periods for participants, considering diverse roles and potential quarantine periods resulting from international travel
- Time zones and duration of the session

Arrangements for a physical meeting in line with past IPCC precedent are well understood and implemented up to before the COVID-19 pandemic started. Given the spread of the current mutation of the virus and the rate of vaccination worldwide it can be expected that the COVID-19 pandemic will prevent an unknown number of countries from attending physical meetings in Germany and in the United Kingdom during the first quarter of 2022. In addition, restrictions relating to COVID-19 might give rise to regional imbalances (e.g., favouring those countries with high levels of vaccination, limited quarantines, or which hold in common border agreements). Furthermore, while some delegations may be able to attend a physical WG II session, the close proximity to the WG III session might result in some delegations being unable to return home between the two sessions due to the length of quarantine restrictions in place in their home countries. A physical meeting also presents substantial risks in terms of COVID-19 transmission. On this basis, a physical meeting failed against each of the IPCC standards / assessment criteria (inclusiveness, equal opportunity, and transparency).

The feedback received from IPCC-54 / WG-14 participants through a survey³ commissioned by the IPCC secretariat indicates that the virtual format implemented was able to support the IPCC standards set as the criteria for this assessment. A careful review of this format further shows that all countries were provided the opportunity to participate through the same mode, platform and work under the same conditions. This format involves a lower risk of COVID-19 infection; and a smaller carbon footprint is seen as a co-benefit.

This sets the following premises for the WG II and WG III approval sessions:

- To enable participation for all delegations no matter where they are, all meetings should take place on a virtual meeting platform, regardless of whether fully virtual or hybrid.
- There should be no more than two meetings in parallel – plenary, contact groups – with no more than one further huddle held at any one time.
- Support provided by the Technical Support Unit (TSU) through defined scheduling and provision of regular Conference Room Papers (CRPs), as well as the support provided by the IPCC Secretariat through the papersmart portal, to ensure transparency of the process.
- As a virtual meeting format needs to follow a strict schedule, the approval sessions need to be prolonged (e.g. to two weeks, as per WG I experience) to ensure transparency and inclusiveness for all participants and to allow sufficient time to work according to the IPCC's high standards.
- Extending the duration of approval sessions also better enables spreading the timing of activities across various time zones, thereby avoiding an unfair burden on participants from specific regions, with detrimental effects to health and wellbeing minimised. Aiming at equal working conditions for all delegations is considered key for the success of the approval sessions of the WG II and WG III reports.
- Conducting informative activities such as webinars or question and answer sessions ahead of the approval session helped enhance interactions between delegations and the drafting team.
- Developing a guidance document, including details on the conducting of an approval session in a virtual setting and the schedule of the session, helped towards a smooth and successful running of the session.
- The presence of a Core Science and Support Team together at a single venue might enable improved working conditions (e.g., some combination of Working Group (WG) Co-Chairs and Technical Support Unit; WG Vice-Chairs and IPCC Vice-Chairs; SPM Drafting Authors; IPCC Secretariat).

³ The IPCC received 127 responses from IPCC-54/ WG-14 participants representing 61 countries.

A hybrid format was considered with the following key features:

- To minimise the potential spread of COVID-19, a maximum of two delegates per country (head of delegation + alternate) participate physically at the venue, additional delegates may participate via zoom.
- Delegations who cannot or choose not to physically attend participate via online meeting platform.
- To allow for equal participation to the session all meetings of the session are held on online meeting platform.

A comparative assessment of the Hybrid and Virtual Meeting format (Annex I) shows that a virtual meeting is the format that most adhered to the standards of IPCC (inclusiveness, equal opportunity, transparency), avoided potential regional imbalances in participation, and mitigated risks associated with COVID-19, as well as avoiding additional challenges concerning workload and recovery periods in a hybrid meeting.

Annex I: Comparative assessment of hybrid and virtual format

Criteria/ standard	Hybrid Meeting		Virtual Meeting	
	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<i>Inclusiveness</i>	Delegations can choose through which mode they would prefer to participate (physical, virtual or both with a split delegation).	Physical attendance might favour countries with high vaccination rates or that share common border policies with host countries (this could also increase risk of regional imbalance).	All countries participate through the same mode.	No choice in mode of participation.
<i>Equal opportunity</i>	In-session arrangements would ensure that all session activities would also be delivered through the virtual platform.	Potential disadvantage to countries not able to attend physically. Benefits of attending physically reduced as all activities will be online anyway.	All countries work under the same conditions.	Some countries may have limited or unreliable internet connectivity and electricity as well as all issues arising due to time zone differences which affect participants availability at the meeting
<i>Transparency</i>	A physical presence allows for additional communication (e.g. eye contact and body language) to facilitate rapport building and session progress.	Those not in attendance physically may feel unfairly disadvantaged by not being in the room.	All countries participate through the same platform, sharing the same interfaces for engaging in activities.	Non-verbal communication on a virtual platform is restricted
<i>Risk to participants from COVID-19 infection</i>		Increased likelihood of COVID-19 outbreak due to larger number of participants from a higher number of countries attending physically.	Lower likelihood of COVID-19 outbreak due to limited number of core staff attending physically.	

	Hybrid Meeting		Virtual Meeting	
<i>Criteria/ standard</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<i>Session management</i>		In-person delegations would need to manage communication with their virtual colleagues. Additional challenges for the preparation, management and Co-Chairing of the session with delegates both on site and working remotely.	Delegations could arrange themselves locally as to their preference. Preparation and management easier with a single meeting format. Building on the experience from the WG I approval	
<i>Duration</i>	Both sessions would be circa two weeks in duration.			
<i>Time zone</i>	Both approaches would require careful management of time zones so that the burden of less-sociable working hours is spread across regions.			