

Controversy over the IPCC's 1.5°C Special Report (SR1.5)

Penang, 2 July (TWN) — The issue of 1.5°C Special Report (SR1.5) by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) became highly contentious at the recently concluded climate talks in Bonn, Germany.

The failure to arrive at substantial conclusions on the SR1.5 report hogged media headlines which reported on the Bonn talks. Below is a report of what actually transpired at the talks on the matter.

The talks were held from 17-27 June and the issue was discussed in UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) under a sub-agenda item titled 'Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C'. The sub-agenda item was under the agenda item on 'Matters relating to science and review'.

Among the contentious issues included whether the issue should be discussed as a separate agenda item; what substance from the report should be captured in draft conclusions; and what further work should be done related to 1.5°C.

'Gentlemen's Agreement'

Ahead of the SBSTA opening on 17 June, the SBSTA Chair, **Paul Watkinson (France)**, convened closed-door consultations with Parties where he apprised them that there were objections to the inclusion of the sub-agenda item on the SR1.5 in the agenda. He sought a resolution on the matter to ensure that the SBSTA agenda would be adopted "smoothly", sources said.

Repeating the mandate from the 24th session of the UNFCCC's Conference of the Parties (COP 24) held in Poland in last year, he said that COP 24 through its decision (1/CP.24), had requested SBSTA "to **consider**" (emphasis added) SR1.5 "with a view to strengthening scientific knowledge on the 1.5 °C goal, including in the context of the preparation of the Sixth Assessment Report of the [AR6] and the implementation of the Convention and the Paris Agreement (PA)".

During the meeting Parties deliberated on whether "to consider" meant creating a separate agenda item on the issue, sources said.

According to **Saudi Arabia**, consideration could be an event or discussions under an existing agenda item rather than creating a new agenda item.

Switzerland and the **European Union (EU)** said that they were in favour of discussions under a separate agenda item, which in their view would not be a permanent new agenda item. They suggested that the issue could perhaps conclude at the June Bonn session.

The **Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)**, **Least Developed Countries (LDCs)** and the **Independent Alliance of the Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC)** spoke to the importance of the report and of discussing it under a separate agenda item, and said they looked for substantive conclusions at the Bonn session.

Saudi Arabia responded that they were interested in having time and space to discuss the report and that they had not had the time and space to voice their views about the report. It agreed with the approach of wanting to start and close discussions at the Bonn session.

Australia said it saw procedural conclusions emerging at the end of the Bonn session. The **United States (US)** said it was happy to have discussions and to work on a substantive conclusion, adding that if Parties were unable to achieve consensus, the agenda item itself would conclude and at minimum, they would have procedural conclusions. The matter should not move to the next session, said the US.

The consultations with SBSTA Chair thus concluded with a 'gentlemen's agreement' that the issue would see substantive exchanges among Parties and the matter would conclude at the Bonn session. In relation to the conclusions, the SBSTA Chair said conclusions would depend on the discussions during the session and encouraged Parties to reach substantive conclusions

but if there was no agreement among Parties, there would be procedural conclusions.

Discussions on the issue

Thus, with the “gentlemen’s agreement” as the backdrop, Parties discussed the SR1.5 spread over seven informal consultations, co-facilitated by **Annela Anger-Kraavi (Estonia)** and **Ladislav Chag'a (Tanzania)**.

The informal consultations saw exchange of substantive views among Parties, several procedural difficulties in relation to when to draft conclusions and engage in informal-informal settings, besides several divergent views on how to capture the discussions in the draft conclusions.

Saudi Arabia highlighted several knowledge gaps of the SR1.5 and said that these should be reflected in the draft conclusions. It quoted the knowledge gaps from the report in areas such as the availability of information; lack of adequate research to analyse projected differences in impacts of 1.5°C and 2°C warming; intersection of climate change with development pathways among several other issues.

Canada suggested that while the knowledge gaps were reflected in the level of confidence with the findings in SR1.5, it said that it hoped to see “more comprehensive addressing” of the issues raised by Saudi Arabia. **New Zealand** wanted the conclusions to reflect that the report had enhanced the understanding of countries and that countries were using the findings of the report.

The **EU** said the report was quite useful, and encouraged the scientific community to address the gaps, while outlining that the discussion be captured in the draft conclusions. It said that it agreed with the challenges highlighted by Saudi Arabia but that SR1.5 is a building block and that further reports such as Special Report on Land and Oceans and the AR6 of the IPCC are due, and this should be reflected in the conclusions.

Costa Rica said while it understands the limitation of scientific research, the SR1.5 had used the “best available science”.

Saint Kitts and Nevis for the **AOSIS** thanked Saudi Arabia for pointing out the knowledge gaps and added that the gaps were proof that the report should be discussed further. St Kitts and Nevis alluded to a proposal jointly tabled by the AOSIS, LDCs and AILAC, which highlighted the importance of SR1.5, underscored the urgency of climate action and included future work in relation to SR1.5 in the form

of workshops to further increase understanding of SR1.5.

LDCs and **AILAC** backed St Kitts and Nevis in their interventions and underlined the importance of messages from SR1.5. **Ethiopia** for the **LDCs** stressed that one should not question the limitations of the report and that AR6 of the IPCC would address the limitations.

Draft Conclusions

Following substantive discussions among Parties, the co-facilitators presented a version of the draft conclusions on 25 June, which was further revised following comments by Parties. The revised version, released on 26 June, had 16 paragraphs. During the informal consultations, the co-facilitators proposed that Parties go through the draft conclusions paragraph by paragraph.

The first four paragraphs were procedural in nature. The fifth paragraph noted that the SR1.5 had increased Parties’ collective understanding of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and paragraph 6 referred to SR1.5 and took note of the level of greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 to hold the increase in global average temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Paragraphs 7 to 10 highlighted the knowledge gaps, methodological challenges and the need to strengthen scientific knowledge. Paragraphs 11-15 spoke to forthcoming reports by the IPCC, future work in the form of workshops and for the secretariat to prepare summary report of workshops. Paragraph 16, in line with the gentlemen’s agreement, said that the work under the sub-item had been completed.

During the discussions, after having gone through the first 6 paragraphs, the **EU** said it had sent texts to the Secretariat which streamlined paragraphs 7-16 and requested the text be shown on the screen. The **EU** was supported by **AOSIS, AILAC, LDCs, Argentina, Japan, US, Australia, Norway, Canada** and **Mexico** which spoke for the **Environment Integrity Group (EIG)**. **St Kitts and Nevis** for **AOSIS** further said that they had had “informal conversations” and agreed with the EU to streamline the text.

Saudi Arabia, however, refused to see any text that was a result of consultations and discussions that they were not aware or been a part of. It requested the co-facilitators to not deviate from the agreed mode of work and to continue proceeding paragraph by paragraph. It also said that paragraphs 7 to 10 on knowledge gaps and the shortcomings of the report spoke to the heart of the discussion they had had.

Zimbabwe also suggested Parties carry on the mode of work as agreed.

India referred to the EU's last-minute proposal as a "bolt from the blue" and said that "Parties are suddenly aligning with the EU as if the EU is getting isolated and it needs support." India requested Parties to "not indulge" in processes that would lead to disruption and called for a balanced and informed decision on the issue. It also suggested that wherever Parties wanted text to be added, they could add to the conclusions as they went along each of the paragraphs.

However, Parties ran out of time at the session, and with the draft conclusions left unresolved, the SBSTA Chair consulted with Parties on 27 June, the final day of the Bonn Climate talks on the way forward.

The resolution

On 27 June, the SBSTA Chair proposed procedural draft conclusions to Parties in closed-door consultations. According to sources, **AOSIS** were unwilling to go ahead with the proposals and said that they did not fulfill the mandate as Parties had spent considerable time on procedure rather than substance. Sources said that the discussion was heated, with some Parties threatening to break the gentlemen's agreement.

However, there were several groups that supported the Chair's proposal, some willingly, and others grudgingly. **Russia, the EU, US, Saudi Arabia, Norway, India and Iran** supported the proposal. The **LDCs** said they

could go along with the Chair's proposal, with some changes.

Following further consultations, Parties agreed on the following draft conclusions, which they later adopted in the closing plenary of the SBSTA.

"1. The SBSTA considered the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C (SR1.5).

2. The SBSTA recalled decision 1/CP.24, paragraphs 24–29, and noted Parties' engagement and exchange of views on the SR1.5 at this session.

3. The SBSTA expressed its appreciation and gratitude to the IPCC and the scientific community for responding to the invitation of the COP and providing the SR1.5, which reflects the best available science.

4. The SBSTA thanked the Chairs of the SBSTA and the IPCC for the SBSTA-IPCC special event titled "Unpacking the new scientific knowledge and key findings in the SR1.5 held at COP 24 and noted the summary report that they prepared on the event.

5. The SBSTA noted the views expressed on how to strengthen scientific knowledge on global warming of 1.5 °C and agreed that its work under this agenda sub-item has been completed.

Several Parties though expressed their disappointment on not arriving at substantive conclusions on the issue of SR1.5 in their statements made at the closing Joint Plenary of the SBSTA and Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI).