



Future of the IPCC – UK Government Response to IPCC

This document sets out the UK Government's response to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) request for views to inform the scope and timescale of its post Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) review process.

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has consulted with the devolved administrations, other relevant UK government departments, and UK based Review Editors (RE) and Coordinating Lead Authors (CLA) of the AR5.

1. Which are the main questions and issues that should be considered in the context of the future of the IPCC?

The UK considers that the AR5 preparation process shows that the IPCC faces several challenges but also has opportunities. We consider the IPCC needs to deal more effectively with increasing complexity and volume of material to be assessed, the challenge of regional issues, and the needs of different report end users. It also needs to be more flexible and expand its product range. Communication will grow as a key issue and the IPCC will need to work with the growth in social media to exploit opportunities afforded by new technology.

We suggest the following topics for consideration under the post AR5 review:

IPCC Products

User requirements

The IPCC should consider how better to understand and respond to questions relevant to policy makers and other users in a timely manner.

We suggest that feedback on AR5 be collected from users and contributors, with a view to informing future work.

Assessment products

The current 6 to 7 year reporting period is increasingly challenging, given the size and complexity of the assessment reports (ARs), which is linked to the enormous amount of literature now being generated.

The IPCC should consider the merits of a full assessment process on a 6 to 7 year cycle, coupled to more frequent updates of key findings and more focussed Special Reports. Consideration should also be given to developing reports which are able to provide a more rapid response to the UNFCCC. This would have implications for the procedures for preparing reports.

Web-based "wiki" type tools may be useful for both report preparation and publication. We suggest the IPCC evaluates the idea to determine suitability and possibilities for use.



IPCC structure

The current three working group (WG) report structure attracts specialists and delivers comprehensive knowledge across these areas. However, there is a risk that it promotes a “silo approach” rather than facilitating cross-cutting/integrated assessment reports, which may be of more value to policy makers.

We do not propose fundamental change to the three WG structure, but suggest it could be beneficial to examine opportunities to promote more cross-working between them. Consideration should be given to:

- Integration between WGs at very early stages to bring information together in a more synergistic way;
- Reports being produced by multi-disciplinary, cross-working group author teams;
- Changes to the timing/sequence of WG reports that could facilitate better integration (e.g. by giving more time for WGI scenarios to be used in WII) or bring other benefits.

Report structure and scope

We think governments should continue to define and agree on the scope of reports. Consideration should be given to whether authors could have more flexibility over report structure, to ensure duplication is avoided and emerging issues can be incorporated.

Report preparation

The workload for authors in preparing reports is already considerable. The IPCC should consider opportunities to simplify the preparation process:

- Is there the opportunity to produce any reports in partnership with other relevant organisations, either for major publications or for on-going work between reports?
- Would the appointment of more full time specialists assist preparation and reduce the burden on voluntary authors?
- Should financial assistance be provided to CLAs (e.g. to appoint research assistants or full time junior scientists to support each contributor)?

Expert selection process

The process for identifying, selecting and appointing contributors could benefit from revision, to promote greater inclusivity and transparency:

- Could more specific criteria be developed to attempt to improve the balance of the geographical distribution, experience and gender of contributors?
- Should the selection criteria and a “Register of Interests” be published online?
- Leading expert REs cannot input technically to chapters. Is this appropriate? Is the role too narrow? Could RE roles be held by experts from closely related disciplines?



Expert retention and succession planning

We note that experienced experts are important to the success of the IPCC, but that they may find work load too great to continue full participation in future. We suggest the IPCC further considers how to retain and use experienced experts, whilst introducing new authors to the report preparation process.

Methodology reports

The UK notes the reliance of the UNFCCC reporting and review process on IPCC inventory methods, and the importance of continuity in the Inventory Task Force and the Technical Support Unit (especially given emergence of new requirements e.g. unconventional oil and gas or CCS), and emerging developments in verification and remote sensing. The UK suggests these developments should be handled by reports that are supplementary to the 2006 Guidelines, with consideration of a full update of guidelines post 2015.

IPCC structure, size, mandate and governing Principles

Next IPCC Bureau

The UK has no specific proposals for the next IPCC Bureau at this stage, but note that it is likely to be shaped by the outcome of this review.

Task Force Bureau

The UK considers a Task Force Bureau (TFB) should continue to direct the Task Force for Greenhouse Gas Inventories work. Any issues raised for assessment reports could also be considered with respect to the development of methodologies.

Revision of Principles governing IPCC work and Appendices

These may require revision depending upon the outcomes of this consultation, particularly if new products are developed.

Review process

During the AR5 preparation there has been some external criticism of the review process and the decision of the IPCC not to openly release draft reports. "Leaked" reports can be quoted misleadingly, however they cannot be commented on by the IPCC or its members. Authors need space to prepare reports, the early drafts of which may appear misleading if considered in isolation or out of context. Consideration should be given to possible options:

- Would full and open public review be useful? What processes/resources would be needed to deliver this? Could draft reports be made publically available, whilst retaining the review for experts only?
- How could IPCC manage a large increase in comments, whilst ensuring sufficient expert views are generated?



Communication and outreach

Communication and outreach work is of fundamental importance to the IPCC deliverables and vital to ensuring the work has maximum impact, reaching the largest number and range of stakeholders and different language speakers possible. The following questions should be considered:

- How can the IPCC communication strategy be made more proactive?
- How can IPCC better communicate both the nature of assessment process and its findings, across a range of levels and types of audience (e.g. public, industry, government, NGO)?
- Is there a role for specialist communication experts in the preparation process?
- Can the IPCC produce further approved materials or pursue new partnerships, to catalyse educational activities (e.g. UNEP education programme)?
- What opportunities are there for IPCC to engage with stakeholders and the public both before and after assessments?
- Can the IPCC make more use of digital and social media as tools to increase accessibility and enhance awareness of the results of the assessments?
- Is there a role for non-text based products, e.g. graphics or video?

2. What should be the process and timeline for the consideration of and decisions with regards to the future of the IPCC?

The process and timeline must be in accordance with IPCC procedure. We endorse the timescale outlined in the invitation letter and background paper.

The timescale should be sufficiently rapid that plans for future work can be proposed at the earliest opportunity post AR5 Synthesis Report publication, so they can be considered and implemented at an early stage of the next Bureau.

The process should include a comprehensive review and consideration of lessons learned. This should include seeking feedback from contributors and end-user groups. It should also include work to consider/understand the relationship of IPCC with its stakeholders in order to identify what needs they have from the IPCC, and enable the IPCC to improve interfacing with them.

A dedicated Task Group could be set up to undertake this review, as there is likely to be considerable work to undertake between meetings. This group should be established at the next plenary session.