

IPCC 33rd SESSION, 10-13 May 2011, ABU DHABI
DECISIONS TAKEN WITH RESPECT TO THE REVIEW
OF IPCC PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

Decision

Recalling the recommendation of the InterAcademy Council (IAC) on IPCC Conflict of Interest Policy that the IPCC should “develop and adopt a rigorous conflict of interest policy that applies to all individuals directly involved in the preparation of IPCC reports, including senior IPCC leadership (IPCC Chair and Vice Chairs), authors with responsibilities for report content (i.e., Working Group Co-Chairs, Coordinating Lead Authors, and Lead Authors), Review Editors, and technical staff directly involved in report preparation (e.g., staff of the Technical Support Units and the IPCC Secretariat)” and recalling the decisions taken at the 32nd Session.

At its 33rd Session, the Panel:

Adopted the “*IPCC Conflict of Interest Policy*” as provided in Appendix 1 to this decision;

Extended the mandate of the Task Group on Conflict of Interest Policy in order to develop proposals for Annexes to the Policy covering Implementation and the Disclosure Form with a view to adopting a decision at the IPCC 34th Session;

Decided to work towards early implementation of the Policy with a view to bringing all those covered by the Policy within its remit as early as possible during the Fifth Assessment cycle and no later than the IPCC 35th Session.

Noting that Working Groups I and II, and the Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories (TFI), have implemented, and Working Group III is in the process of designing, interim Conflict of Interest Policies that are broadly consistent with the IPCC Conflict of Interest Policy at Appendix 1, the Panel:

invited the Task Group to consult the Working Groups and the TFI in developing proposals for Annexes on Implementation and the Disclosure Form;

invited the Task Group to develop proposals for Implementation and smooth transition of all three Working Groups and the TFI to the approved IPCC conflict of interest policy designing the details to the needs of each.

The Panel *invited* the Working Groups and the TFI, in taking forward their activities under the Fifth Assessment cycle, to take note of the Conflict of Interest Policy at Appendix 1 and ensure, as far as possible, that their actions are consistent with the Conflict of Interest Policy at Appendix 1.

IPCC CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

Purpose of the Policy

1. The role of the IPCC as stated in paragraph 2 of the Principles Governing IPCC Work is to assess on a comprehensive, objective, open and transparent basis the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation. IPCC reports should be neutral with respect to policy, although they may need to deal objectively with scientific, technical and socio-economic factors relevant to the application of particular policies.

2. The role of the IPCC demands that it pay special attention to issues of independence and bias in order to maintain the integrity of, and public confidence in, its products and processes. It is essential that the work of IPCC is not compromised by any conflict of interest for those who execute it.

3. The overall purpose of this policy is to protect the legitimacy, integrity, trust, and credibility of the IPCC and of those directly involved in the preparation of reports, and its activities. This policy is principles-based and does not provide an exhaustive list of criteria for the identification of such conflicts. The Panel recognizes the commitment and dedication of those who participate in IPCC activities. The policy should maintain the balance between the need to minimise the reporting burden, and to ensure the integrity of the IPCC process. In this way, it seeks to encourage participation and to ensure that the representativeness and geographic balance of the Panel is not impaired whilst continuing to build and maintain public trust.

4. The IPCC Conflict of Interest Policy is designed to ensure that conflicts of interest are identified, communicated to the relevant parties, and managed to avoid any adverse impact on IPCC balance, products and processes, thereby protecting the individual, the IPCC, and the public interest. The individual and the IPCC should not be placed in a situation that could lead a reasonable person to question, and perhaps discount or dismiss, the work of the IPCC simply because of the existence of a conflict of interest.

5. Identifying a potential conflict of interest does not automatically mean that a conflict of interest exists – the purpose of the policy is to enable individuals to provide the relevant information necessary for each particular situation to be evaluated.

Scope of the Policy

6. This policy applies to senior IPCC leadership (the IPCC Chair, Vice Chairs, Working Group and Task Force Co-Chairs), other members of the IPCC Bureau and members of the Task Force Bureau, authors with responsibilities for report content (Coordinating Lead Authors, Lead Authors), Review Editors and the professional staff of the Technical Support Units (TSUs).

7. The policy applies to the development of all IPCC products including but not limited to: assessment reports; special reports; methodology reports and technical papers.

8. The professional staff members of the IPCC Secretariat are employees of WMO and/or UNEP and are subject to their disclosure and ethics policies, which include conflict of interest.

9. The policy will be executed to reflect the various roles, responsibilities and levels of authority, of participants in the IPCC process. In particular, consideration should be given to whether responsibility is held at an individual level or shared within a team; to the level of influence held over the content of IPCC products.

10. The application of the conflict of interest policy to those elected to positions within the IPCC should reflect their specific responsibilities.

Conflict of Interest

11. A “conflict of interest” refers to any current professional, financial or other interest which could: i) significantly impair the individual’s objectivity in carrying out his or her duties and responsibilities for the IPCC, or ii) create an unfair advantage for any person or organization. For the purposes of this policy, circumstances that could lead a reasonable person to question an individual’s objectivity, or whether an unfair advantage has been created, constitute a potential conflict of interest. These potential conflicts are subject to disclosure.

12. Conflict of interest policies in scientific assessment bodies typically make a distinction between “conflict of interest” and “bias,” which refers to a point of view or perspective that is strongly held regarding a particular issue or set of issues. In the case of author and review teams, bias can and should be managed through the selection of a balance of perspectives. For example, it is expected that IPCC author teams will include individuals with different perspectives and affiliations. Those involved in selecting authors will need to strive for an author team composition that reflects a balance of expertise and perspectives, such that IPCC products are comprehensive, objective, and neutral with respect to policy. In selecting these individuals, care must be taken to ensure that biases can be balanced where they exist. In contrast, conflict of interest exists where an individual could secure a direct and material gain through outcomes in an IPCC product. Holding a view that one believes to be correct, but that one does not stand to gain from personally is not a conflict of interest.

13. The conflict of interest requirements in this policy are not designed to include an assessment of one’s behaviour or character or one’s ability to act objectively despite the conflict of interest.

14. This policy applies only to current conflicts of interest. It does not apply to past interests that have expired, no longer exist, and cannot reasonably affect current behaviour. Nor does it apply to possible interests that may arise in the future but that do not currently exist, as such interests are inherently speculative and uncertain. For example, a pending application for a particular job is a current interest, but the mere possibility that one might apply for such a job in the future is not a current interest.

15. Professional and other non-financial interests need to be disclosed only if they are significant and relevant. If in doubt about whether an interest should be disclosed, individuals are encouraged to seek advice from the appropriate IPCC body as defined in Annex A. Significant and relevant interests may include, but are not limited to, senior editorial roles, advisory committees associated with private sector organizations, and memberships on boards of non-profit or advocacy groups. However, not all such associations necessarily constitute a conflict of interest.

16. Financial interests need to be disclosed only if they are significant and relevant. These may include, but are not limited to, the following kinds of financial interests: employment relationships; consulting relationships; financial investments; intellectual property interests; and commercial interests and sources of private-sector research support. Individuals should also disclose significant and relevant financial interests of any person with whom the individual has a substantial business or relevant shared interest. If in doubt about whether an interest should be disclosed, individuals are encouraged to seek advice from the appropriate IPCC body as defined in Annex A “Implementation”.

17. To prevent situations in which a conflict of interest may arise, individuals directly involved in or leading the preparation of IPCC reports should avoid being in a position to approve, adopt, or accept on behalf of any government the text in which he/she was directly involved.

Annex A: Implementation

To be developed under the extended mandate of the Conflict of Interest Policy Task Group

Annex B: Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form

To be developed under the extended mandate of the Conflict of Interest Policy Task Group