

## Submission by The Netherlands on the future of the IPCC

The Fifth Assessment has been a particularly turbulent period for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The unfortunate mistakes in the Fourth Assessment, and the delayed response to these, unveiled serious vulnerabilities in the organisation, the process of producing reports, the perceived integrity of the people involved and the communication. Based on the recommendations by the InterAcademy Council (IAC), the IPCC entered into a prolonged period of self-reflection and decided to implement a large number of incremental improvements. This has increased the ability of the IPCC to cope with the Fifth Assessment successfully, but the pace at which the world changes is stepping up, and we can be sure that the IPCC must adapt to these changes if it still wants to retain significance in the future.

### Current practice

- IPCC produces extensive assessments, containing an enormous amount of knowledge, which, in varying combinations, represent valuable assets for different countries, sectors, private enterprises, research communities, the media and the public.
- Accessing the right combination of knowledge from the four separate volumes of the IPCC assessment, is nearly impossible, because of the sheer size of three of these assessments. It would be different if the IPCC products were fully web-based and accompanied by functionalities that allow the creation of maximum relevance for any user.
- Because of the huge effort needed, new assessments appear with increasing intervals, now seven years; literature must be available a substantial period before the approval of an IPCC report. Parts of the information in the reports are quickly outdated, and this influences users' perception of value of the entire reports.
- Although the IPCC reports contain internal references, the derivation of conclusions is very difficult. This lack in transparency is not only fuels climate skepticism concerning the reliability of the conclusions of the reports, but also reduces the usefulness of IPCC reports to access the underlying literature.

### Proposal

- The IPCC should adjust its focus and organisation to policy and societal needs.
- The IPCC needs to adjust its principles.
- The IPCC needs more transparent, focused and up-to-date assessments.
- The IPCC should focus more on interactions with societies.
- The IPCC should reconsider the regionalisation of the assessments, aiming for an efficient division of work among relevant organisations.
- A task group needs to be formed on the future of the IPCC.

### **The IPCC should adjust its focus and organisation to current policy and societal needs.**

Despite the improvements following the recommendations by the IAC in 2010, there is room for further improvement. The demands the IPCC will be confronted with in the future for providing more transparent, focused and up-to-date assessments can best be met by having an organization that is led by an Executive Director. This appointed official would have the managerial and scientific capabilities to lead a continuous and flexible assessment process and implement the changes proposed below. An Executive Director could also more easily be a policy-neutral spokesperson than an elected Chair. The central organisation should have sufficient resources to coordinate assessment processes and prepare tailor-made communication materials.

Even the role of the IPCC, its position in the UN system (as a daughter of WMO/UNEP), the management structure (an elected Chair and Bureau), the role of civil society in scoping, drafting and accepting its products, and increasing the relevance of its products for a wide range of user groups

should be discussed. The outcome of these discussions should be reflected in the principles governing the work of the IPCC to take effect in time for the Sixth Assessment.

**The IPCC needs to adjust its principles.** We believe that limiting the scope of the IPCC to human-induced climate change is undesirable, especially because natural climate change is a crucial part of the total understanding of the climate system, including human-induced climate change. The Netherlands is also of the opinion that the word ‘comprehensive’ may have to be deleted, because producing *comprehensive* assessments becomes virtually impossible with the ever expanding body of knowledge and IPCC may be more relevant by producing more special reports on topics that are new and controversial.

**The IPCC needs more transparent, focused and up-to-date assessments.** The use of the internet continues to expand. It would be easier to keep IPCC assessments up to date if they would be fully web-based. Digitalisation also increases the transparency of the reports. For example, in addition to internal links in the SPM to the underlying chapters (already done for AR4), links can be added in the chapters to the relevant parts of scientific publications to simplify the accessibility to the sources. The assessment should be more dynamic by regular updates of the chapters, with only one round of expert review, and by shortening the assessment cycle. The reports are currently perceived to be quite dated already a few years after they have been published. We suggest:

- two working groups instead of three. For example, it is possible to expand WGI to include WGII subjects that are closely connected to the information in WGI. An example is the SREX special report, where climate extremes and risk-based information are combined. WGIII would then include adaptation and mitigation measures and their environmental impacts. In this way there would be two working groups, which would shorten the cycle but will also to improve the consistency in the assessment cycle and facilitates the synthesis. A separate Synthesis Report would not be needed if the second WG would synthesize its information with the first WG, also in its summaries.
- to put more emphasis on Special Reports.
- to provide more regular SPMs, based on updated chapters.
- to coordinate the contents of the assessment with other organisations that provide assessments on climate change, like WMO, UNEP and IEA. Coordination may strengthen the assessment capacity and avoid repetition. This would reduce the pressure on scientists contributing to the assessments.

**The IPCC should focus more on interactions with societies.** ICT innovations facilitate interactions with knowledge and perspectives that are present within societies. Besides broad participation in quality control and review processes and harvesting knowledge from many groups, we believe that it would be beneficial to actively deal with the questions relevant to societies. We also suggest to investigate the policy makers’ needs more systematically, and involve actors outside policy making and scientific arenas (e.g. industries and large companies but also civil society), especially in the scoping process.

**The IPCC should reconsider the regionalisation of the assessments, aiming for an efficient division of work among relevant organisations.** The regionalisation is subject of discussion. On one hand, there is a need for more regionalisation to increase the policy relevance. On the other hand, regionalisation significantly increases the volume of the assessment, makes it more difficult to read and causes an almost unmanageable writing process. It becomes more vulnerable to uncertainty, inconsistency and the existence of potential errors. Consequently, regionalisation puts more pressure on the contributors. It also complicates the synthesis of the assessment. Finally, there is a demand for up-to-date accessible climate services, for which the length of the assessment cycle is too long. We are aware of the relevance of regional information, particularly for vulnerable regions in developing countries with limited resources. However, we believe organisations such as the WMO

should strengthen the position and the resources of the Global Framework of Climate Services (GFCS) in line with the Nairobi work programme. The main goal of GFCS is to enforce the resilience of vulnerable regions by facilitating the access to tailor-made climate information on spatial scales that are more useful to stakeholders than IPCC can ever provide. This does not diminish the possible role there is to play for the IPCC in providing guidance for interpreting regionalised climate information and also building capacity in this respect in developing countries.

**Task group on the future of the IPCC**

Our suggestions relate to the functionality of the products of the IPCC and the setup and governance of the organization that merit careful consideration. That is why the Netherlands advocates the creation of a task group, that would report at every upcoming Panel meeting, and will present a widely supported proposal for the revised approach of the IPCC for the Sixth Assessment Report.