

Comments on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples and Their Communities Major Group on the working documents for OEWG-3.2 (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/6, .3/7, and .3/8)

Date: May 16, 2025

Context

We bring to your attention the importance of this science policy panel for Indigenous Peoples who are disproportionately impacted by chemicals, waste and pollution in our territories, waters, air, wild foods, and medicines. Our communities are too often on the frontlines of pollution from industrial activities and aggressive developments, including impacts from plastic pollution at all stages of the plastic lifecycle, from extraction and production to the widespread dispersal of microplastics in our territories and environment. Despite generations of settler colonial impacts, we Indigenous Peoples maintain deep connections to our territories, and we are participating in this process to remind delegates that the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) must be upheld in all science policy panel bodies, committees, assessments, implementation mechanisms, financial supports, and other deliverables.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous knowledge systems, including Indigenous science, are rooted in intergenerational knowledge, grounded in living relationships with the land and the natural world, and based on cultural teachings of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. Indigenous science weaves together relationships and responsibility, with Indigenous approaches for observing, monitoring, and protecting the natural world that centers the health and wellbeing of our human and more-than-human kin. The holistic approach of Indigenous science is vital to enable the transformative change required to solve the global crises of chemicals, waste, and pollution. It is critical that Indigenous knowledge systems are recognised, respected, and meaningfully included in all science policy processes.

Western Science Bias

Unfortunately, when Indigenous knowledge is mentioned in international agreements and assessments, it is predominantly just words, tokenized, stripped of context, and lacking both protection and the guarantee of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). There are rarely adequate safeguards for how this knowledge will be accessed or used, nor assurances of the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples who are the only rightful holders and experts of Indigenous knowledge systems. In these

processes, Indigenous knowledge systems are described as only “complementing” Western science (see E.38. in UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/6), rather than contributing equally to assessments and solutions. This bias can be avoided through the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples.

Full and Effective Participation of Indigenous Peoples

We would like to highlight that the resolution for this process presented the ad hoc open-ended working group with the responsibility **to ensure that that the science policy panel: “Is interdisciplinary, ensuring contributions from experts with a broad range of disciplinary expertise; has inclusive participation, including indigenous peoples¹; and has geographical, regional and gender balance”** (UNEP/EA.5/Res.8, in 6b). If the science policy panel is to be truly representative as called for in the resolution, the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, protections for Indigenous knowledge systems including science, and the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples must be assured and mainstreamed throughout the subsidiary bodies, committees, and assessments.

We therefore call on the ad hoc open-ended working group to:

1. **Ensure that the future science policy panel upholds the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Text affirming this commitment should be added, at a minimum, to the preamble of the foundational document, and mainstreamed in the panel’s bodies, assessments and processes.
2. **Provide for a minimum of two seats in the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee (IEC) specifically for Indigenous experts** from different regions, with funding provided to enable their in-person participation in all meetings required for this role. See Article 18 of UNDRIP.²
3. **Establish an Indigenous Advisory Committee** to review and advise the governing body on nominations of Indigenous experts to the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee, as well as to other subsidiary bodies, committees and assessments, and to advise on mainstreaming the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Indigenous knowledge systems, with the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the science policy panel processes.

¹ We respectfully remind honoured delegates that “Indigenous Peoples” should always be capitalized.

² Article 18: Indigenous Peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions. (UNDRIP)