Compilation of substantive comments received from focal points after the second meeting of the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen on the Task Team report and the template for baseline screening on nitrogen actions

The second meeting of the UNEP Working Group on Nitrogen took place online on 17 January 2023. Two documents were presented and discussed during the meeting: the report of the Task Team entitled "Discussion paper on options for facilitating improved coordination of policies across the global nitrogen cycle" and the draft template for country-level baseline screening on actions for sustainable nitrogen management. The Co-Chairs of the Working Group invited the meeting to submit written feedback on the Task Team report and the template for baseline screening on nitrogen actions to the secretariat after the second meeting of the Working Group.

The tables below present a compilation of general and specific comments received after the meeting on 1) the Task Team report (**Table 1**) and 2) the template for baseline screening on nitrogen actions (**Table 2**). Comments on the latter were taken into consideration in the preparation of the revised template.

Table 1: Comments received on the discussion paper on options for facilitating improved coordination of policies across the global nitrogen cycle.

Comment type	Comment
General comment	It is considered that the best approach to this type of contamination is to **consider nitrogen compounds throughout their entire life cycle**, including the raw materials used, the products and the waste generated throughout the process. In turn, the impacts must be analyzed in all the matrices and taking into account the interactions that are generated.
General comment	The document presents a realistic panorama of the situation, where **using an existing organism is not going to unify the problem from the point of view of the entire life cycle; but creating a new institution will take time and funding**. It agrees with the recommendation of the High Level Segment of INMS-4 in Nairobi (April 2019) to create an intergovernmental mechanism for the coordination of nitrogen policies, based mainly on existing networks and platforms.
General comment	Pollution by nitrogen compounds has negative impacts on the environment, among which the problems associated with water quality, air quality and greenhouse gases stand out. It is **not only important to coordinate policies at the global level, but also at the local/regional level**, since the diversity of negative impacts of this substance involves different institutions and the measures taken by one could have unintended consequences in other areas.

	For this reason, **the sustainable use of nitrogen must be considered and action plans made that cover its entire life cycle**. Putting the focus on favoring synergy between institutions that work on climate change, agriculture, water quality, food quality, biodiversity, among others that are affected by pollution related to the use of nitrogen compounds.
General comment	Would like to see the discussion paper **address the need to reduce emissions from fertilizer production**. Since fertilizer and ammonia production is a significant source of greenhouse gases and air pollution, reducing emissions from this part of the chain should be a consideration.
General comment	Would recommend **including advocacy and outreach** within the discussion paper and including language on **engaging nitrogen producers to raise awareness on sustainable nitrogen management**. This approach may be more practical for some governments in terms of efficiency, as there are far less producers than farmers. Additionally, some governments may already be advocating for sustainable nitrogen use.
General comment	Would recommend including **food waste reduction and food waste management** (composting).
General comment	We appreciated the expert presentations at the meeting of the progress made to date to discuss possible options to improve actions to reduce nitrogen pollution. However, we found that the **framing of potential solutions could be more fully explored by the working group as there are a range of options in between status quo and INCOM**, and that **the discussion did not include political barriers to the potential solutions**.
General comment	While all of us would like to see real progress and not get "hung up" on the semantics of the wording of an agreement, we also all know that details of the wording are important and often consume considerable effort at negotiations. Here we discuss some wording issues that we believe will be important. **Interconvention vs. Intergovernmental**: "Intergovernmental" activities can include "interconvention" activities, but **intergovernmental activities can be much broader**. For example, various UNEP projects involve intergovernmental participation without being part of a convention or a multi-lateral environmental agreement (MEA). **The proposed exchange of information and experiences pertaining to developing national action plans to reduce N wastes is an excellent example of how an intergovernmental mechanism could be valuable without requiring participation of conventions or other MEAs.** If there is reluctance by UNEA members to agree to an "interconvention" mechanisms (and there is, indeed, such reluctance), then adopting "intergovernmental" as the type of mechanism being discussed would significantly address the concerns of some member states and would allow the discussion to advance. **Coordination vs. Collaboration vs. Communication**: Although the discussion paper developed by the task team asserts that their **use of "coordination" does not imply that the INCOM would have any authority over participating conventions or MEAs, that word nevertheless implies some**

	level of influence that imposes an expectation. This is not acceptable from our perspective. "Collaboration" more clearly implies a voluntary participation. **"Communication" among bodies working on overlapping or inter-related topics pertaining to nitrogen is what we are really trying to accomplish.** We believe that facilitating "communication" is the most likely activity of an INCOM and is probably the most apt word to characterize what the INCOM would to (Intergovernmental Communication Mechanism on Nitrogen Management). If there are clear examples of types of collaboration that extend beyond communication (we would be interested to learn of such examples if they exist), then **perhaps "collaboration" could be a viable compromise**.
General comment	We are aware that the UNEA Resolution 5.2 "Encourages Member States to accelerate actions to **significantly reduce nitrogen waste globally by 2030** and beyond through the improvement of sustainable nitrogen management". **What is the relationship between this target and the four options** presented in the UNEP Nitrogen Working Group? If the answer to 1. states that the two are linked (the questions below are based on the same assumption), we do need to **consider options from the perspective of what is the most rapid approach generating the highest impact**, bearing in mind that only 7 years are left to the target timeframe. Besides, **a roadmap for achieving the target is also necessary**.
Specific comment Page 3, paragraph 10	Would suggest that the paper makes the important linkage to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). The paper should say that **failure to address nitrogen in a coherent and coordinated way will also impact the world's ability to meet biodiversity goals, Target 7.0.1 in particular** where the Parties to the CBD committed to **reducing the use of nutrients, such as nitrogen, by half.**
Specific comment Page 3, paragraph 10	The paper could also make a **link between KMGBF Target 7 and the call to halve nitrogen waste by 2030 in the 2019 Colombo Declaration**, which launched the UN Global Campaign on Sustainable Nitrogen Management in October 2019 and mentioned in paragraph 10 on page 3.
Specific comment Annex 2	In addition to the initiatives provided in Annex 2, suggests including **additional processes relevant for global efforts to address the impacts of excessive nitrogen on the marine and coastal environment and biodiversity**: • UNESCO-IOC Nutrients and Coastal Impacts Research Programme • UNESCO-IOC Harmful Algal Blooms Programme • Global Wastewater Initiative • The High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, which adopted specific actions relevant to nutrients (including N) as part of its 74 Transformation actions the Panel has identified as necessary to build a sustainable ocean economy. The three relevant actions are: o Promote agriculture farming practices and technology that minimizes the discharge of excess pesticides, fertilizers, manure, and soil particles to eliminate eutrophication and ocean dead zones in coastal waters. o Implement integrated watershed management practices.

	o Encourage the aquaculture industry to apply best practices in order to reduce the amount of nutrient leakage in connection with feed formulation and application, and minimize the discharge of excess antibiotics.
Comment on Options Section C, paragraph 12-13 and Annex 1 page 7-9	**The four options listed in the discussion paper are incomplete**. The fourth option (establishment of an Intergovernmental Coordination Mechanism - INCOM) emphasizes coordination among Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), without justifying the emphasis on MEAs or providing examples how coordination of among them is envisioned or will advance the objective of effectively reducing N wastes. **The independence of the various MEAs with respect to their mandates and governance structures poses a serious obstacle to the effectiveness of a proposed INCOM**. In contrast, the **UNEA5.2 resolution emphasizes sharing of National Action Plans (NAPs) to reduce nitrogen wastes, and NAP development is entirely independent of the various MEAs**. A focus on coordination of efforts to develop NAPs is a fifth option that holds more promise for progress to influence national actions, leading to potentially meaningful reductions of N wastes, nationally, regionally, and globally. The existing **Global Partnership on Nutrient Management (GPNM) could facilitate encouragement and sharing of NAP drafts without the need for creating a new INCOM that has an unclear remit and that faces serious structural challenges**. A new objective (i.e., promoting the development and sharing of NAPs) could **revitalize the GPNM and provide the most likely pathway to reducing N wastes.** We propose that a **fifth option be considered by the NWG that is focused on promoting and sharing NAPs to reduce N wastes**.
Comment on Options Section C, paragraph 12-13 and Annex 1 page 7-9	In the initial overview of advantages and disadvantages of each of the options, **Option 3 and Option 4** have disadvantages such as ""Would require the establishment of a new Secretariat" and "New and additional funding streams would be required, both to negotiate and operationalize the treaty and to support Parties in the implementation of their obligations / the mechanism and to support Member States to deliver sustainable nitrogen management". These options **would require a very long period for reaching agreements on a treaty or international cooperation mechanisms**, the establishment of a new secretariat and a new fund, the adoption and implementation of projects and the delivery of outcomes. Hence, it seems **unrealistic that the target by 2030 can be met with Option 3 or Option 4**.
Comment on Options Section C, paragraph 12-13, Annex 1 page 7-9	Although nitrogen is a global agenda**, it can be understood that nitrogen is an issue mainly in the South and East Asian regions, from nitrogen consumption perspective.** If certain actions (including financial contributions) are required to member states across the world through Option 3 and 4, justification of the requirement will be needed.
Comment on Options Section C, paragraph 12-13, Annex 1 page 7-9	Considering the timeframe by 2030, **it would be realistic that existing institutions, such as, UNEP, FAO, World Bank (especially Global Environment Facility), Asia Development Bank, will take the lead in securing funds for nitrogen and implementing projects through Option 1 or**

	2. In this regard, much deeper discussion and analysis on Option 1 or 2 to achieve the target is needed.
Comment on Options Section C, paragraph 12-13, Annex 1 page 7-9	The key for discussion and analysis on Option 1 or 2 may be to **replicate the successful best practice of nitrogen consumption reduction in Europe and other regions**, as shown in the UN Frontier Report (p.59) in South and East Asia. (We believe what can be achieved in Europe can be achieved in Asia.) **Sharing best practices and capacity building projects will be essential.**
Comment on Options Section C, paragraph 12-13, Annex 1 page 7-9	The disadvantages of options 1 and 2, "Unlikely to fully address negative impacts of nitrogen," should be further analyzed. **Further consideration of options needs review of the challenges of existing initiatives and funding mechanisms**, such as: （1） **What is the reason why nitrogen consumption by fertilization continues to increase** despite the implementation of various initiatives and policies in countries and regions in South and East Asia (What is lacking in policies, initiatives, capacity, etc.)? （2） **How effective the support through existing international frameworks, international organizations and funding mechanisms have been?** What is insufficient or lacking in these frameworks and others? If such funds need to expand the scale or modify their purpose, what needs to be added or modified? And what are the obstacles? （3） **What are possible solutions** to these issues (excluding those that will take more than 10 years)?
Comment on Options Section C, paragraph 12-13, Annex 1 page 7-9	**Option IV**: It would be very helpful for the whole Nitrogen Working Group – especially for those who did not take part in the 2nd Meeting on 17th of January 2023 - to **explain why this option is named "intergovernmental". Because so far the talk was of "interconvention"** – which is a huge difference in my eyes.

Table 2: Comments received on the draft template for country-level baseline screening on actions for sustainable nitrogen management.

Comment type	Comment
General comment	**The detailed questions in the template address all the problems related to nitrogen**, taking into account the emissions, releases and waste generated in the industrial and agro-industrial sphere. It is proposed to start with a question that asks to **identify local actors** who work or have contributed to the preparation of legislative actions, action plans, inventories, guides and/or good practice manuals. This, in turn, will make it easier to **guide the requests for information that need to be made to fill out the form and establish a first route of information**.

General comment	Regarding to the draft template for collection of information on national action plans, policies and strategies, **we are agree on the template** and do not have any feedback or comment.
	The baseline screening asks for national policy provisions on preventing and reducing nitrogen waste. **The screening should also take into account actions by farmers, fertilizer producers, and associations**. As an example, if there is a high awareness of methods for reducing nitrogen waste, but it was not achieved through national policies, a country may score unfairly low on this section of the screening. It should also be noted that there may be actions at the subnational level (e.g. states-provinces-territories…) that may not necessary be reported. It would be relevant to account for those actions in the baseline, especially given that the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework included **subnational governments** among the actors charged with the implementation of the framework, which includes Target 7 on pollution.
General comment	We find that this **questionnaire would be difficult to fill out with meaningful information**. We would have to consult several ministries (environment, agriculture, energy), it would be time consuming, it would not be feasible to include timely input from numerous subnational governments, NGOs, and the private sector stakeholders who play important roles, the answers would not be comprehensive, and we are not sure how useful the responses would be to the NWG.
Specific comment Q1	Targets are usually based on concentrations of pollutants in air (e.g., NOx) or water (e.g., nitrate). **These targets do not translate easily into estimates of "reducing N losses" so perhaps the question should be reworded**.
Specific comment Q2, Q4a, Q4b, Q5 and Q6	For this question [Q2] and several others, it should be noted that **monitoring systems for measuring pollutants are often established and run by subnational governments**. It would be difficult for the country to answer this question, since we have different monitoring systems across the states and many more at the municipal level.
Specific comment Q3	This question is too vague. **"Sustainable use of nitrogen" is difficult to define**, let alone measure.
Specific comment Q4b	This question on "sustainable use of chemicals and organic fertilizers" not only has the same problem as Q2 with respect to subnational jurisdictions, but it would also be difficult to answer regarding safety issues for storing and worker safety. **Ammonium nitrate is an explosive, so the issue of its transport and storage goes well beyond sustainable agriculture** and involves other ministries.
Specific comment Q6	There are both **federal and subnational policies related to wastewater** discharge, so the response to Q2 still applies.
Specific comment Q7 and Q8	In addition to federal and subnational governmental efforts, **there are many private sector and NGO efforts to raise awareness N use efficiency and waste reduction**. The same is true for training of crop advisors and farmers.

	The question seems to presume that the national government is the main source of awareness raising, which is not the case.
Specific comment Q9	The **answers for both investments to improve fertilizer use efficiency and municipal wastewater management are complicated by the hierarchies of federal, state, and local jurisdictions**. For example, municipal wastewater treatment is the responsibility of municipal governments, although sometimes there are state and federal funds available to assist. It would be difficult to provide more detailed answers.
Specific comment Q10	While research is supported by the federal government, **most of the development and application of technologies are carried out by the private sector**. The question seems to imply that such technological advancements are imposed by government, but this is seldom the case.
Specific comment	Suggest to add an **additional row for other relevant information on action** on sustainable nitrogen management.