

Fourth meeting of the International Nitrogen Management System (INMS-4). Summary of the High-Level Segment

29 – 30 April 2019, UN Environment HQ, Nairobi

Summary

The fourth meeting of the International Nitrogen Management System (INMS-4) was held on 29 April – 2 May 2019 at the UN Environment headquarters in Nairobi. The meeting included a high-level segment on 29 – 30 April with representatives of countries, intergovernmental conventions and programs, together with scientists, business, civil society and other stakeholders. The high-level segment allowed rapid follow up of the resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management adopted by the fourth UN Environment Assembly (UNEP/EA.4/Res.14).

The meeting recognized the multiple opportunities for better nitrogen management associated with water, air, climate, biodiversity, soils, stratospheric ozone, food and energy, including the need to develop improved coordination between relevant multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs). The meeting endorsed the proposal of the UNEA-4 nitrogen resolution to establish an Inter-convention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism and identified the next steps.

The meeting noted that the “Towards INMS” project supported by the Global Environment Facility offers an opportunity to jumpstart implementation of the UNEA-4 resolution by provision of scientific and technical support. The engagement with UNEP Permanent Representatives and other government experts, together with relevant intergovernmental conventions and MEAs, allowed examination of the multiple connections across the nitrogen cycle, while providing guidance on priorities.

The meeting agreed that coordination is needed to address sustainable nitrogen management at three levels including the interactions between these levels:

1. Intergovernmental co-ordination, especially between countries, conventions, other MEA’s and stakeholders
2. National co-ordination within countries, between different ministries, agencies and other stakeholders
3. Provision of science and technical information in support of national and international policy processes, under the guidance of governments.

The meeting identified the need to establish a network of National Focal Points to the Inter-convention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism. These National Focal Points would help mobilize coordination within countries and allow improved coordination at the international level.

The meeting requested that the Executive Director of UNEP invite countries to nominate National Focal Points to the Inter-convention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism. The goal should be to establish an efficient process for governments, MEAs, science community and others to coordinate in identifying the multiple benefits of sustainable nitrogen management. As a first step, National Focal Points should be invited to submit a review of current national nitrogen policies and comment on their future plans for improved coordination, to be shared with other countries through the coordination mechanism.

The meeting requested that the Executive Director report on progress in establishing the coordination mechanism to the next annual subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives in October 2019 and to the 8th International Nitrogen Initiative conference in May 2020.

Summary of the High-Level Segment

29 April 2019, Plenary Session

1. The High-Level Segment of the Fourth meeting of the International Nitrogen Management System (INMS-4) was held at the headquarters of UN Environment in Nairobi on the 29-30 April 2019. It was attended by 120 participants from 36 countries, including representatives from a range of multi-lateral environmental agreements.
2. The meeting was co-chaired by Ms Susan Gardner (Director, Ecosystems Division, UN Environment) & Professor Mark Sutton (Director of the International Nitrogen Management System - INMS) of the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology.
3. A full report summarizing the statements to the Plenary High-Level Segment, together with copies of presentations, can be found at <http://www.inms.international/file/540>
4. The full report includes:
 - a. Statements on the Global Nitrogen Challenge.
 - b. National and Regional Statements
 - c. Perspectives from Inter-governmental conventions and programmes
 - d. Statements summarizing progress in INMS science and evidence
 - e. Global perspectives on nitrogen management from UN and other international organisations, business and science communities.
5. An evening reception at UN Environment headquarters was hosted by Ms Susie Kitchens, Deputy High Commissioner of the United Kingdom to Kenya and Permanent Representative to UNEP. The reception was addressed by Ms Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director of UNEP. Ms Msuya emphasized the importance of developing public communication messages, which she followed up by initiating the preparation of a nitrogen article and short video on 'Fixing Nitrogen' for World Environment Day 2019.¹

¹ <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/bittersweet-nature-nitrogen-calls-better-management-practices>

30 April 2019, Multi-Actor Discussion

6. A discussion was facilitated by INMS Director, Prof Mark Sutton, and INMS Task Manager, Ms Isabelle van der Beck of UNEP, focused on reviewing the mandate of the UNEA-4 resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management, UNEP/EA.4/L.16², hereafter the 'nitrogen resolution'. The meeting mainly addressed paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of the nitrogen resolution, i.e., those specifically related to policy. The meeting agreed that future discussions are needed to amplify the developments needed concerning the remaining paragraphs (d) and (e) of the resolution. The meeting also recognized the need to develop national and international engagement in relation to future nitrogen financing mechanisms.

Options for improved integration of nitrogen policies

7. The discussion first focused on reviewing four options for addressing the nitrogen policy arena, as presented in the concept note accompanying submission of the nitrogen resolution to UNEA-4 (See **Appendix 1** to the full report at www.inms.international/) and as summarized in the UN Environment 2018 / 2019 *Frontiers Report*, chapter on "The Nitrogen Fix: From Nitrogen Cycle Pollution to Nitrogen Circular Economy".
8. The four options identified in these documents are:
 - Option 1: Status quo** – fragmentation of nitrogen issues between multiple MEAs. It was noted that this is not effective in addressing the many synergies and trade-offs across the nitrogen cycle.
 - Option 2: One existing MEA takes the lead** in addressing interactions across the nitrogen cycle between water, air, climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, soils, stratospheric ozone etc. It was noted that this model faces the difficulty of limited topic-based and geographic mandates of existing MEAs.
 - Option 3: Establishment of a new intergovernmental convention on nitrogen.** It was noted that this could provide a strong approach linked to possible goals, but could also be seen as overlapping with existing MEAs.
 - Option 4: Establishment of an Inter-convention Coordination Mechanism on nitrogen.** It was noted that this could provide a flexible approach that would bring multiple MEAs together to address synergies, getting the best from existing activities while avoiding duplication.
9. The meeting noted the request to the Executive Director of UNEP under paragraph (a) of the nitrogen resolution: *"Consider the options to facilitate better coordination of policies across the global nitrogen cycle at the national, regional and global levels, including consideration of the case to establish an intergovernmental coordination mechanism on nitrogen policies, based primarily on existing networks and platforms and consider the case for developing an integrated nitrogen policy, which could enhance the gravity of common cause between multiple policy domains"* (UNEP/EA.4/L.16).
10. Reflecting on the options and the resolution text, the balance of discussion showed that most country and convention representatives recommended moving forward with Option 4. The meeting also noted that there is potential to engage further with the countries and MEA's if there is future willingness to progress further with Option 3 (i.e., intergovernmental nitrogen

² The unedited version of 9 March 2019 was used for this discussion. This document has since been re-edited by the services of UN Environment and re-issued as UNEP/EA.4/Res.14.

convention or “for developing an integrated nitrogen policy”). It was noted that there is an opportunity to develop innovative ways of working with the Committee of Permanent Representatives in fostering flexible integration across multiple policy domains.

Role of the International Nitrogen Management System within the Coordination Mechanism

11. The meeting recognized the need to clarify the functions of both a) *improved policy co-ordination across the nitrogen cycle* and b) *consolidated scientific support to inform the development of nitrogen policies*. It was noted that INMS is being established as a science support process that needs to work in close co-operation with the proposed Inter-convention Nitrogen Co-ordination Mechanism.³
12. It was recognized that further work is needed to develop a possible architecture and modes of operation of the Inter-convention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism, including its relationship with INMS. It was proposed that embedding INMS as an integral part of the coordination mechanism is likely to be more resilient and enable more effective guidance from countries than establishing two separate bodies. It was agreed that the co-ordination mechanism consists primarily of and for the countries and MEAs, enabling them to identify and manage the synergies between issues, with appropriate support and engagement from the wider scientific, business and civil society communities.

Role and character of the Inter-convention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism

13. The meeting agreed that the co-ordination mechanism should provide a platform that delivers support at three levels:
 - a) It should **stimulate international coordination between countries and between multi-lateral agreements relevant for nitrogen**. It should have a strong focus on identifying synergies between intergovernmental nitrogen policies and on developing strategies to minimize any trade-offs.
 - b) It should **stimulate national coordination within countries** towards developing a more coherent approach for sustainable nitrogen management, especially in making links between relevant ministries, departments and agencies through the establishment of **National Focal Points**.
 - c) It should **stimulate the coordination of scientific and technical support** for national and international policy processes, under the guidance of governments. This science function is currently being developed under INMS, while the coordination mechanism serves to guide and inform the agenda for scientific and technical support.
14. The meeting agreed that the coordination mechanism should:
 - a) Aim for an efficient approach to work with governments and others to mobilize sustainable nitrogen management as an approach to achieve **multiple environmental benefits and Sustainable Development Goals**.

³ A distinction was also noted between INMS as a developing process and “Towards INMS” as a project funded by the Global Environment Facility and project partners as a catalyst to jump-start the INMS process

- b) **Establish National Focal Points** to the nitrogen co-ordination mechanism as a foundation to mobilize action. The National Focal Points should primarily be policy experts in a relevant ministry, who may be supported by technical experts as necessary.
 - c) **Support a coordinated approach to foster nitrogen communication strategies.** The meeting recognized that nitrogen has multiple facets and huge relevance across the global economy for environment and health, linking many issues. The complexity can make nitrogen hard to communicate, but also provides an opportunity for a much richer engagement with the public and stakeholders than has so far been achieved.
 - d) Include a **procedure for monitoring and reporting** of progress in relation to national and international nitrogen policies, their implementation and potential for synergies
 - e) **Consider how to raise the nitrogen discussion to a higher level**, i.e. at the level of heads of state, deputy heads of state and ministers. It was agreed that there is a need to further finesse clear messages as to the benefits of taking action on nitrogen in order to progress multiple environmental and Sustainable Development Goals while also being a contribution to improving resource efficiency and developing circular economy
 - f) Provide a space for **exploration of future actions for high-level engagement.** Examples included discussion on the possible hosting of a future **Nitrogen Summit** and the possible establishment of a '**UN Nitrogen Forum**' to explore the opportunity for **aspirational goals**, which could be reported back to develop next steps in the UN Environment Assembly.
 - g) **Work in partnership between UN Environment, the countries and conventions, with input from other UN programmes and other organizations.** These may include, for example, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management (GPNM), the Global Waste Water Initiative (GWWI) and regional programs such as the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC) and the Partnership in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA). The list is illustrative rather than exhaustive.
15. The country delegates and organizations present expressed their willingness to support and work with UN Environment. The meeting welcomed the new establishment of the International Nitrogen Management System under the joint leadership of UN Environment and the International Nitrogen Initiative.

Recommendations

16. The meeting identified the following **requests to the UNEP Executive Director and others:**
- a) For the UNEP Executive Director to contact countries formally under the mandate of the nitrogen resolution, **requesting that countries establish and identify National Focal Points** to the Inter-convention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism. The National Focal Points should be requested by the Executive Director to provide a **review of existing environmental and other policies in their country relevant to nitrogen and to provide a reflection on the plans of the country to develop more co-ordinated nitrogen policies and opportunities in future.**⁴ The meeting agreed that, whilst such a request is necessarily on a

⁴ The global nitrogen policy database of INMS and joint survey with OECD are available as resources for this work.

voluntary basis, the seriousness of the task should be reflected by setting clear deadlines for submission.

- b) For the UNEP Executive Director to reach out formally to the **relevant conventions, MEA's and others to invite these processes to provide a summary of their existing activities in relation to nitrogen**. The bodies approached should also be invited to **identify the opportunities for working towards improved co-ordination** in addressing the opportunities and threats associated with human disturbance of the nitrogen cycle.
- c) For the UNEP Executive Director to work with countries and partners to develop **communication pathways** at multiple levels to reach a wide range of audiences, for example members of the public, business, farmers, local government, education, science community etc.
- d) For the UNEP Executive Director to consider further the effective options for developing the **long-term institutional arrangements** of the proposed inter-convention nitrogen co-ordination mechanism, including the establishment of a **secretariat** to the co-ordination mechanism.
- e) For the UNEP Executive Director to work with countries and key engagement partners, in preparation for the next annual subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, to develop an **outline of a proposed architecture for the Inter-convention Nitrogen Coordination Mechanism**, including the possible roles of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, Bureau of the Coordination Mechanism, National Focal Points, INMS, representatives of nitrogen-relevant conventions, MEAs and other inter-governmental bodies, other experts and stakeholders, including the International Nitrogen Initiative.
- f) For the UNEP Executive Director, Permanent Representatives and others to engage with their governments to **explore further options for high-level engagement**, for example towards hosting of a possible future Nitrogen Summit, as well as possible establishment of a 'UN Nitrogen Forum' to explore the opportunity for aspirational goals. The UNEP Executive Director is invited to report progress to the 8th International Nitrogen Initiative conference in May 2020.

1 – 2 May 2019 – Technical Sections of the INMS-4 meeting

- 17. Other parts of the INMS-4 meeting focused on the technical delivery of the Towards INMS project Work Plan, including on the development of tools and methods, on quantification of global nitrogen flows impacts and scenarios, on regional scale demonstration for country clusters and on awareness raising and knowledge sharing. While the focus of these sessions was on delivery by the scientific community, the presence of government representatives, MEAs, business, civil society and others provided valuable guidance in the process. Component Reports of the technical work of INMS-4 will be mounted on the INMS web portal as they are ready (inms.international).