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By Mark Kinver

'Green light' for global biodiversity science panel



Science and environment reporter, BBC News

So far, nations have failed to halt the rate of biodiversity loss. An international meeting has given the green light to the formation of a global "science policy" panel on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Proponents say the new body will "bridge the gulf" between scientific research and urgent political action needed to halt biodiversity loss.

More than 230 delegates from 85 nations backed the proposals at a five-day UN meeting in Busan, South Korea.

The international panel is expected to be formally endorsed in 2011.

Among the main roles of the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) will be to carry out peer reviews of scientific literature in order to provide governments with "gold standard" reports.

It is expected that the IPBES will be modelled on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which plays a major role in shaping global climate policy.

'Historic agreement'

"The dream of many scientists in both developed and developing countries has been made a reality," said Achim Steiner, executive director of the UN Environment Programme (Unep).

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Professor Bob Watson UK government scientific adviser [Study highlights global decline](#)

"Indeed, IPBES represents a major breakthrough in terms of organizing a global response to

the loss of living organisms and forests, freshwaters, coral reefs and other ecosystems that generate multi-trillion dollar services that underpin all life - including economic life - on Earth."

The meeting's chairman Chan-Woo Kim, director-general of South Korea's environment ministry, said the "historic agreement" laid the foundations for a full scientific assessment of the challenges facing the world.

"The essence of this vision is to ensure environmental sustainability while pursuing development," he explained.

"For this to be realised, it is crucial to have a credible, legitimate and policy-relevant understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem services."

The "Busan Outcome" reached in Korea is the culmination of negotiations that began in Paris back in 2006.

The idea to establish the IPBES followed the publication of the UN's Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in 2005, which concluded that human activities threatened the Earth's ability to sustain future generations.

Professor Bob Watson, chief scientific adviser to the UK's environment department and one of the meeting's vice chairmen, said it was "absolutely critical" to address global biodiversity loss.

"There has been an urgent need to strengthen the legitimacy and credibility of scientific research in this field," he observed.

"IPBES has the potential to now raise global understanding of the threats we face... and empower governments to make policies to counter them, based on solid and integral scientific evidence."

Plans to set up the IPBES are set to be formally established by the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, which opens in September.

They will then be presented to environment ministers for endorsement at Unep's global ministerial meeting in February 2011.