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## Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice

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### Reports on other activities

**Annual report on the technical review of information reported under the Convention related to biennial reports and national communications by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention**

## **Annual report on the technical review of information reported under the Convention related to biennial reports and national communications by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention**

### Note by the secretariat

#### *Summary*

This report describes the activities relating to the technical review of information reported under the Convention in the first biennial reports and sixth national communications submitted by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention in 2014. It also provides information on the composition of expert review teams and on the training of reviewers.

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## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Mandate**

1. The Conference of the Parties (COP), by decision 23/CP.19, requested the secretariat to prepare an annual report to the Subsidiary Body for Scientific Technological Advice (SBSTA) on the composition of expert review teams (ERTs) performing the review of national communications (NCs) and biennial reports (BRs), including the selection of experts for the review teams and the lead reviewers (LRs), and on the action taken to ensure the application of the selection criteria<sup>1</sup> defined in the “Guidelines for the technical review of information reported under the Convention related to greenhouse gas inventories, biennial reports and national communications by Parties included in annex I to the Convention”<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter referred to as the UNFCCC review guidelines).

2. The UNFCCC review guidelines indicate that LRs shall collectively prepare an annual report to the SBSTA as a part of the report mentioned in paragraph 1 above, containing suggestions on how to improve the quality, efficiency and consistency of the reviews of greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories, BRs and NCs.<sup>3</sup> As the review cycle for the first biennial reports (BR1s) and sixth national communications (NC6s) of Parties included in Annex I to the Convention (Annex I Parties) will be completed in 2015 and the input to this report will be gathered at the LR meeting planned for March 2015, the suggestions by LRs on how to improve the quality, efficiency and consistency of the reviews of GHG inventories, BRs and NCs will be included in the annual report to SBSTA 43.

### **B. Scope of the note**

3. This report provides information on the activities relating to the review of BR1s and NC6s conducted in 2014, including the composition of the ERTs for the review of BR1s and NC6s and training activities under the Convention.

4. An overview of the status of submission and review of BR1s and NC6s, as well as the status of review reports, is contained in document FCCC/SBI/2014/INF.19.

### **C. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice**

5. The SBSTA will be invited to take note of the information contained in this report.

## **II. Technical review as a part of the international assessment and review process**

6. The new international assessment and review (IAR) process for developed country Parties established by decision 2/CP.17 was launched in early 2014, following the receipt of BR1 and NC6 submissions from Annex I Parties. The IAR process aims to promote the

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<sup>1</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraphs 36 and 37.

<sup>2</sup> Annex to decision 23/CP.19.

<sup>3</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraph 44.

comparability of efforts among all developed country Parties with regard to their quantified economy-wide emission reduction targets. The IAR comprises two steps: a technical review of the national reports of each developed country, including their BRs and NCs, followed by a multilateral assessment (MA) of the progress made towards achieving their economy-wide target.

7. The technical review, which constitutes the first step of the newly established IAR process, is conducted by the international ERTs and is expected to last from early 2014 to mid-2015, with the output being the in-depth review reports of the NC6s and the technical review reports of the BR1s. These reports will serve as an input to the MA process.

8. The second step of the IAR process, the MA,<sup>4</sup> is conducted under the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) at its working group session. The first round of the MA will be conducted at SBI 41 and will involve the assessment of the performance of a total of 17 developed countries. The assessment is based on the BR1s and NC6s as well as on the review reports and will focus on how the developed country Parties are progressing towards their economy-wide emission reduction targets. It is anticipated that all 44 developed country Parties will be assessed by SBI 43.

#### **A. First technical review cycle of the first biennial reports and sixth national communications**

9. In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines, a technical review includes a preparatory desk review, an in-country visit (or centralized review) and the preparation of the review report. In total, a technical review of the reports of one Party takes at least four months to complete, not including the preparation of the review. The milestones and the timeline of the review cycle are presented in the figure below.

10. In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines, in the years when NCs and BRs are submitted together, both the NC and the BR will be subject to an in-country review. A Party's BR shall be reviewed in conjunction with its NC in the years in which both the BR and the NC are submitted.<sup>5</sup> The submission due date for NC6s and BR1s alike was 1 January 2014; therefore, the reviews of each Party's BR1 and NC6 were conducted in conjunction with each other. Between 24 February and 8 November 2014, in-country reviews for 31 Annex I Parties<sup>6</sup> were conducted.

11. In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines, the secretariat may consider other UNFCCC review processes when coordinating BR and NC reviews, with a view to addressing the need to improve the cost-effectiveness of the review process and national circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Thus, centralized reviews were organized for the BR1s and NC6s of 10 Parties<sup>8</sup> with total GHG emissions of less than 50 million tonnes of carbon dioxide

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<sup>4</sup> Further information on the MA process can be found at <[http://unfccc.int/national\\_reports/biennial\\_reports\\_and\\_iar/international\\_assessment\\_and\\_review/items/8451.php](http://unfccc.int/national_reports/biennial_reports_and_iar/international_assessment_and_review/items/8451.php)>.

<sup>5</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraphs 18 and 73.

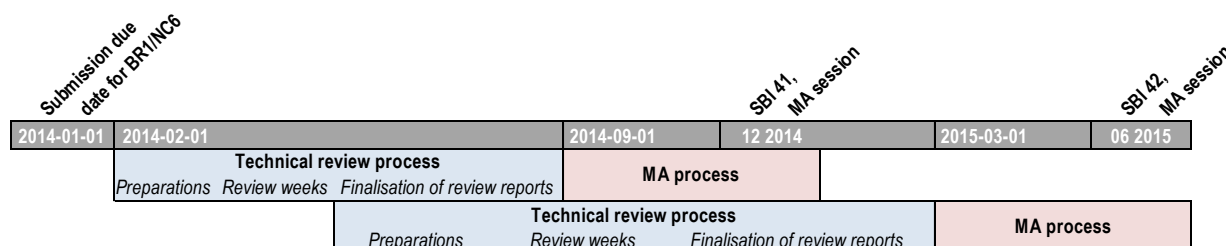
<sup>6</sup> Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

<sup>7</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraph 23.

<sup>8</sup> Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Monaco, Slovakia and Slovenia.

equivalent (excluding land use, land-use change and forestry) in accordance with their most recent GHG inventory submission, with the exception of Parties included in Annex II to the Convention (Annex II Parties), for which the secretariat will organize in-country reviews.<sup>9</sup> The centralized reviews took place from 5 to 10 May 2014 in Bonn, Germany. The in-country reviews of the submissions from the Parties that have not yet submitted complete reports or have indicated their plans to resubmit their NCs have been scheduled for early 2015.<sup>10</sup>

**Milestones and timeline of the review of first biennial reports and sixth national communications in 2014, in accordance with decision 2/CP.17**



*Notes:* (1) The timeline follows the provisions for the technical review process set out in the “Guidelines for the technical review of information reported under the Convention related to greenhouse gas inventories, biennial reports and national communications by Parties included in annex I to the Convention” (the UNFCCC review guidelines) and the provisions for the multilateral assessment set out in the modalities and procedures for international assessment and review contained in decision 2/CP.17; (2) In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines, the expert review teams shall make every effort to complete the individual review of biennial reports within 15 months of the due date of their submission for each Annex I Party.

*Abbreviations:* BR1 = first biennial report, MA = multilateral assessment, NC6 = sixth national communication, SBI = Subsidiary Body for Implementation.

**B. Composition of the expert review teams**

12. The ERTs shall be composed of experts selected on an ad hoc basis from the UNFCCC roster of experts, nominated by Parties and, as appropriate, by intergovernmental organizations. Participating experts shall have recognized competence in the area to be reviewed and shall neither be nationals of the Party under review nor be nominated or funded by that Party.<sup>11</sup>

13. The ERTs may vary in size and composition, taking into account the national circumstances of the Party under review.<sup>12</sup> In-country reviews of BR1s and NC6s were conducted by ERTs consisting of four experts with relevant experience. The reviews of four Parties with large economies (European Union, Germany, Japan and United States of America) were conducted by ERTs consisting of five experts.

<sup>9</sup> Decision 9/CMP.9, paragraph 3.

<sup>10</sup> See document FCCC/SBI/2014/INF.19.

<sup>11</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraphs 26 and 28–30.

<sup>12</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraph 26.

14. In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines, the review experts shall be selected in such a way that the collective skills and competences of the ERTs address all areas, including national circumstances relevant to GHG emissions and removals; GHG inventory information; policies and measures (PaMs); projections and the total effect of PaMs; vulnerability assessment, climate change impacts and adaptation measures; financial resources; transfer of technology; research and systematic observation; and education, training and public awareness.<sup>13</sup> For the reviews of BRs, competence in reviewing the quantitative economy-wide emission reduction target and the progress made towards achieving the target is required.

15. With regard to the division of tasks within the ERT, typically an expert is assigned to the review of information provided on each PaM; projections and the total effect of PaMs and the target and progress made towards achieving the economy-wide target; and the provision of support to developing country Parties. Another expert is typically assigned to the review of information provided on the national circumstances; vulnerability assessment, climate change impacts and adaptation measures; research and systematic observation; and education, training and public awareness.

16. Pursuant to the UNFCCC review guidelines, the secretariat shall select the members of the ERT with a view to achieving a balance between experts from Annex I Parties and Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention (non-Annex I Parties) in the overall composition of the ERTs, and will make every effort to ensure geographical balance among the experts selected from non-Annex I Parties and among those selected from Annex I Parties.<sup>14</sup>

17. In the reviews of the BR1s and NC6s of 41 Annex I Parties conducted in 2014, in total 152 individuals from 72 Parties were involved. Of these experts, 70 were from non-Annex I Parties and 82 from Annex I Parties. Among the experts from Annex I Parties, 32 were from Annex I Parties with economies in transition and 50 were from Annex II Parties.

18. While seeking to ensure geographical balance, the number of reviews conducted by experts from the different regional groups is as follows: African States (15 reviews); Asia-Pacific States (30 reviews); Eastern European States (38 reviews); Latin American and Caribbean States (19 reviews); Western European and other States<sup>15</sup> (50 reviews). From a gender perspective, the ERTs were predominantly composed of men. Out of 152 reviewers, 98 were male and 54 were female.

19. The number of reviews in which the experts nominated by a Party participated varies. Experts from China participated in seven reviews. A few Parties (Austria, Belgium and Denmark) have significantly contributed to the reviews by supporting the participation of their national experts in five to six reviews. Several Parties have supported their experts' participation in three to four reviews, such as Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. Experts from Romania and Thailand participated in four reviews, while experts from Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Ghana, India, Mexico, Slovakia, South Africa, the Sudan and Ukraine participated in three reviews. The table below provides a breakdown of the participation of experts by nominating Party in 2014.

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<sup>13</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraph 77(c).

<sup>14</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraph 37.

<sup>15</sup> The Western European and other States group includes, among other Parties, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

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**Number of review experts participating in the technical reviews of sixth national communications and first biennial reports in 2014, by nominating Party**


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Albania – 1	Cuba – 1	Lithuania – 2	South Africa – 3
Antigua and Barbuda – 1	Czech Republic – 2	Mexico – 3	Sudan – 3
Argentina – 2	Denmark – 5	Mongolia – 1	Swaziland – 1
Armenia – 1	Ecuador – 1	Netherlands – 2	Sweden – 1
Australia – 1	Egypt – 2	New Zealand – 3	Thailand – 4
Austria – 5	Fiji – 2	Norway – 3	Tonga – 1
Bahamas – 1	Finland – 1	Pakistan – 1	Trinidad and Tobago – 1
Belarus – 1	France – 3	Philippines – 1	Turkey – 1
Belgium – 6	Georgia – 1	Poland – 3	Turkmenistan – 1
Bolivia (Plurinational State of) – 1	Germany – 3	Portugal – 1	Ukraine – 3
Bosnia and Herzegovina – 1	Ghana – 3	Republic of Korea – 1	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – 3
Brazil – 3	Greece – 2	Republic of Moldova – 2	United Republic of Tanzania – 1
Bhutan – 1	Hungary – 2	Romania – 4	Uruguay – 1
Bulgaria – 3	India – 3	Russian Federation – 2	United States of America – 4
Canada – 3	Indonesia – 1	San Marino – 1	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) – 1
Chile – 3	Ireland – 1	Saudi Arabia – 2	
China – 7	Japan – 2	Singapore – 2	
Croatia – 2	Kenya – 2	Slovakia – 3	
	Latvia – 2	Slovenia – 2	

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20. The coordination of the reviews and efforts to ensure geographical balance and balance between experts from Annex I and non-Annex I Parties were hampered by the significant rate at which the invitation to participate in the reviews was declined. In total, the secretariat invited 357 experts; of these, 205 experts declined the invitation (57.4 per cent of all invitations). The main reasons for this include a lack of interest in participating in the reviews, other priorities, a lack of time, or a lack of financial support provided to the experts from those Annex I Parties for which the travel cost is not covered by the secretariat. Despite the dedication and commitment of many experts from non-Annex I Parties, in 2014 it was not possible to ensure a full balance in the review teams between Annex I Party experts and non-Annex I Party experts owing to the insufficient number of available experts.

21. It is worth noting that the UNFCCC roster of experts, which includes experts nominated by Parties for the tasks to be performed under the Convention, is partially outdated; some nominated experts lack the relevant competences, while a few Parties, for example Liechtenstein and Monaco, have not nominated any experts. Owing to the shortage of experts or their unavailability to participate in a review, nine experts participated in two reviews and one expert participated in three reviews.

### **III. First meeting of lead reviewers for biennial reports and national communications**

22. LRs play a critical role in the BR and NC technical review process. They should ensure that the reviews in which they participate are performed by each ERT according to

the relevant UNFCCC review guidelines and consistently across Parties, and must also ensure the quality and objectivity of the thorough and comprehensive technical examination of the reviews and provide for the continuity, comparability and timeliness of the reviews.<sup>16</sup>

23. According to the UNFCCC review guidelines, LRs shall act as co-lead reviewers for the ERTs; one co-lead reviewer shall be from an Annex I Party and one from a non-Annex I Party.<sup>17</sup> In all of the reviews conducted in 2014, the ERT composition criteria were met: 33 LRs were from Annex I Parties and 33 from non-Annex I Parties. According to the established practice, the experts who have previous experience in the review processes under the Convention and/or its Kyoto Protocol and have the recognized relevant competences and/or demonstrated leadership skills were invited to act as LRs for the BR1 and NC6 reviews in 2014.

24. In line with the UNFCCC review guidelines,<sup>18</sup> the secretariat organized the first BR and NC meeting of LRs just after the launch of the technical reviews of BR1s and NC6s, on 6 and 7 March 2014 in Bonn. Of the 59 experts that attended, 39 were from non-Annex I Parties and 20 were from Annex I Parties. In addition, one representative of the European Union attended the meeting as an observer. The meeting addressed both procedural and technical issues relating to the review of BRs and NCs with a view to facilitating the work of LRs in ensuring quality and consistency across the reviews. The LRs discussed and agreed on the review process, including requirements and approaches, review tools and the training of review experts.

25. In the conclusions of the first meeting of LRs,<sup>19</sup> the LRs noted that the timely publication of review reports in accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines is essential for the MA and recommended that ERTs make every effort to provide their input in a timely manner in all steps of the review process, and especially in the preparation of the review reports.

26. Also, the LRs noted that the lack of a sufficient number of well-prepared experts available to support the review process may lead to a delay in organizing the reviews in accordance with the timelines set out in the UNFCCC review guidelines. The LRs encouraged Parties to nominate experienced experts to the roster of experts, update the list of experts on the roster as appropriate, and facilitate the participation of experts in the reviews.

27. The LRs noted the need to formalize the current training materials developed by the secretariat in a training programme for the review of BRs and NCs with the purpose of addressing the training needs of new and experienced experts alike, including an assessment of their qualifications, to ensure that they have the necessary competence for participation in ERTs for the review of BRs and NCs.

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<sup>16</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraph 42.

<sup>17</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraphs 38 and 41.

<sup>18</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraph 51.

<sup>19</sup> The conclusions and recommendations of the first meeting of LRs are available at <[http://unfccc.int/files/national\\_reports/biennial\\_reports\\_and\\_iar/application/pdf/conclusions\\_and\\_recommendations\\_first\\_lrs\\_meeting\\_brs\\_ncs.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/national_reports/biennial_reports_and_iar/application/pdf/conclusions_and_recommendations_first_lrs_meeting_brs_ncs.pdf)>.



#### **IV. Training of experts for the review of biennial reports and national communications**

28. Past experience shows that the ongoing training of experts for the review of GHG inventories and supplementary information submitted under the Kyoto Protocol has greatly contributed to the rigour and consistency of the review process. This, in turn, has contributed to a significant increase in the quality of the reported information, improving its transparency, accuracy, completeness, consistency and comparability. As a result of the training activities, experts have improved and updated their professional knowledge and technical skills, enabling consistency to be achieved across the reviews. Experts have also gained a clearer understanding of the review tasks as a result of the training activities, which has helped to improve the efficiency of the review process and shorten the time needed for each specific review task.

29. However, there are no specific requirements for the training of experts participating in the review of NCs. Although training materials were provided to all experts in 2014 (see paras. 31 and 36 below), the lack of formal training requirements for experts involved in the NC review process has, to a certain extent, made the review activities more cumbersome and time-consuming and has, in some cases, undermined the quality of the reviews.

30. The experience from the reviews conducted in the past and in 2014 suggests that the current training activities need to be enhanced to address the most important elements of the review of NCs and BRs. This is particularly relevant for areas such as the review of progress made towards economy-wide emission reduction targets, PaMs and their mitigation effects, emission projections and the provision of financial, technological and capacity-building support, as well as the general and cross-cutting aspects of the technical review process. This would enhance the competence of the experts involved in the review of NCs and BRs and bring greater clarity to the review process, thereby improving the quality of the experts' contribution to the review process.

31. With the aim of addressing such needs, SBSTA 38 requested the secretariat to begin the development of new training materials and procedures before the review of the submitted NC6s and BR1s and to present developed training materials and procedures at SBSTA 39.<sup>20</sup> SBSTA 39 welcomed the presentation made by the secretariat on the development of relevant new training materials and procedures and recognized the importance of implementing the training of review experts before the review of the submitted NC6s and BR1s in the first half of 2014. It requested the secretariat to make the materials available by electronic means for the review experts participating in the reviews in 2014 and to develop a formal training programme for consideration at SBSTA 40.<sup>21</sup>

32. On the basis of those materials, and in response to the request of SBSTA 39, the secretariat prepared a draft training programme for the technical review of NCs and BRs of Annex I Parties,<sup>22</sup> to be implemented in the period 2014–2016, which addresses the elements and issues discussed in paragraphs 29 and 30 above and includes the following four modules:

- (a) General and cross-cutting aspects of the review of NCs and BRs;

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<sup>20</sup> FCCC/SBSTA/2013/3, paragraph 97.

<sup>21</sup> FCCC/SBSTA/2013/5, paragraph 67.

<sup>22</sup> FCCC/SBSTA/2014/INF.12.

(b) Technical review of targets and PaMs, their effects and their contribution to achieving those targets;

(c) Technical review of GHG emissions, emission trends, projections and the total effect of PaMs;

(d) Technical review of the provision of financial support, technology transfer and capacity-building.

33. In developing the draft training programme, the secretariat took into account that the UNFCCC review guidelines state that experts participating in technical reviews shall have recognized competence in the areas to be reviewed.

34. The UNFCCC review guidelines also state that the training to be provided to the experts and the subsequent assessment after the completion of the training<sup>23</sup> and/or any other means needed to ensure the necessary competence of the experts for their participation in ERTs shall be designed and operationalized by the secretariat in accordance with the relevant decisions of the COP.<sup>24</sup>

35. The UNFCCC review guidelines further state that the secretariat shall design and implement training activities for review experts, including LRs, and the subsequent assessment of the experts' qualifications, under the guidance of the SBSTA.<sup>25</sup>

36. As requested at SBSTA 39,<sup>26</sup> the training materials were made available by electronic means to all review experts participating in the review of NC6s and BR1s in 2014 before the review for assistance with their preparation for the reviews. In total, 147 review experts<sup>27</sup> (73 from non-Annex I Parties and 74 from Annex I Parties) have been given access to the training materials. The training modules were used and appreciated by the reviewers who participated in the 2014 review cycle of NC6s and BR1s and were essential to ensure the consistency and comparability of the reviews. The secretariat has received very positive feedback on these materials.

37. SBSTA 40 initiated its consideration of the draft training programme referred to in paragraph 32 above. SBSTA 41 will continue this consideration with a view to preparing and recommending a draft decision for consideration and adoption at COP 20 and providing additional relevant guidance to the secretariat.

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<sup>23</sup> Experts who opt not to participate in the training have to successfully undergo a similar assessment to qualify for participation in ERTs.

<sup>24</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraph 29.

<sup>25</sup> Decision 23/CP.19, annex, paragraph 52.

<sup>26</sup> FCCC/SBSTA/2013/5, paragraph 67.

<sup>27</sup> This number includes all the experts who have accepted the invitation to participate in the reviews. A few of these experts subsequently declined the invitation.