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Arrangements for intergovernmental meetings

Implications of changing the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document provides an overview of the implications of changing from the current annual cycle, as well as options pertaining to, the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies taking into account mandates and commitments under the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement and the views of Parties.



Abbreviations and acronyms

CMA	Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement
COP	Conference of the Parties
GST	global stocktake
NDC	nationally determined contribution
SBI	Subsidiary Body for Implementation

I. Introduction

A. Background and mandate

1. Since SBI 36, the SBI has considered issues relating to the frequency, organization and location of sessions of the governing bodies, exploring options for changing the frequency of the sessions (e.g. from annual to biennial), alternating between smaller and larger sessions and alternating the host of sessions between the seat of the secretariat and a host country.

2. SBI 48 invited Parties to submit views on the frequency and location of sessions of the governing bodies taking place after 2020 for consideration at SBI 50 and requested the secretariat to prepare a synthesis report¹ on the submissions, including on the budgetary and other implications of different proposals contained in the submissions, for consideration at SBI 50.²

3. SBI 50 acknowledged that several issues need to be further considered prior to any change to the current annual cycle of the sessions of the governing bodies and requested the secretariat to prepare an information paper for consideration at SBI 60 that further elaborates on the implications of changing the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies from the current annual cycle taking into account mandates and commitments under the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, and the views and submissions of Parties.³

B. Scope

4. This document provides an overview of implications for some of the mandates and commitments that could be affected by a change in the current annual cycle of the sessions of the governing bodies, and presents possible options pertaining to the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies, taking into account the submissions⁴ received in 2019 and drawing on the synthesis report referred to in paragraph 2 above and other documents prepared by the secretariat.⁵

C. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Implementation

5. The SBI may wish to consider whether changing the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies from the current annual cycle would be practical in the immediate future given the need to maintain political momentum in this critical decade, the urgency of achieving the long-term temperature goal of the Paris Agreement and the implications outlined in this document. It may also wish to consider the most appropriate time for making such a change, ensuring minimal disruption in relation to current workplans, mandates and commitments and that a robust, inclusive and transparent process is in place for making any required adjustments to timelines and cycles.

II. Implications of changing the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies

6. Any change to the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies would need to take into consideration other cycles or timelines relevant to mandates and Parties' commitments under the Convention, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

¹ FCCC/SBI/2019/INF.1 and Add.1.

² FCCC/SBI/2018/9, para. 140.

³ FCCC/SBI/2019/9, para. 133.

⁴ Available at <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissionsstaging/Pages/Home.aspx> (in the search field, type "frequency and location of sessions").

⁵ FCCC/SBI/2015/2 and FCCC/SBI/2016/2.

A. Mandates

7. Changing the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies would have implications in relation to the:

(a) **Five-year cycle of the GST.** The first GST concluded in 2023 at CMA 5, with the next three cycles scheduled to conclude at sessions of the CMA in 2028, 2033 and 2038 respectively. The information collection and preparation component of the GST is mandated to commence at a CMA session at least two years prior to the conclusion of the GST.⁶ Therefore, any change to the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies would need to take into account that sessions of the CMA need to be convened in 2026, 2028, 2031, 2033, 2036 and 2038 for the GST, unless the CMA decides otherwise;⁷

(b) **Annual reporting of the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism and UNFCCC constituted bodies to, and provision of guidance by, the governing bodies.** If the sessions of the governing bodies were not annual, the timelines and/or arrangements for this reporting and provision of guidance may need to be adjusted;

(c) **Review and extension of mandates relevant to entities, processes and constituted bodies by the governing bodies.** For example, the Financial Mechanism is reviewed every four years and the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts every five, while the review of the modalities, procedures and guidelines for the enhanced transparency framework is mandated to take place at the CMA session in 2028⁸ at the latest. Should the timing of those reviews need to be adjusted owing to incompatibility with any change to the current annual cycle of sessions of the governing bodies, this may also have implications for the timelines of the preparations for the reviews as well as for the consequent extension of relevant mandates;

(d) **Annual and biennial high-level ministerial events and dialogues.** High-level ministerial events and dialogues are often mandated to take place in conjunction with sessions of the governing bodies, but alternative solutions may need to be found for organizing such events and dialogues without compromising on their frequency so as to avoid any reduction in political engagement in and momentum around important issues;

(e) **Timing of election and term of office of the President and officers of the Bureau of the governing bodies.** Currently, according to the draft rules of procedure being applied, the term of officers of the Bureau is one year. If the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies were changed, a corresponding adjustment to the term of the officers would need to be considered. In addition, it might be more effective to elect the President of the subsequent sessions of the governing bodies at the end of the preceding sessions so that the President could take the interim time to prepare for the sessions, rather than, as per the draft rules of procedure being applied, only officially being elected at the start of the sessions over which they will preside;

(f) **Election of members of constituted bodies.** The annual cycle of election of members and alternate members of some constituted bodies would need to be adjusted if sessions of the governing bodies were convened less frequently;

(g) **Approval of the programme budget of the secretariat.** The current biennial cycle of the approval process may need to be adapted to align with a revised frequency of sessions;

(h) **Timelines for other mandated action,** such as the consideration of guidance on matters relating to NDCs mandated for the CMA sessions in 2027 and 2028,⁹ the preparation by the Standing Committee on Finance of the report on the determination of the

⁶ Decision 19/CMA.1, para. 8.

⁷ See decision 1/CMA.5, para. 192.

⁸ During the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, the Bureau provided guidance on the organization of work, including to maintain original timelines, meaning year takes precedence over session number; see https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/message_to_parties_and_observers_outcomes_of_cop_bureau_meeting.pdf.

⁹ As footnote 8 above.

needs of developing country Parties related to implementing the Convention and the Paris Agreement for consideration by the COP and the CMA every four years, and the preparation by the secretariat of synthesis reports on Parties' biennial transparency reports and national inventory reports and an annual report on the technical expert review, which would need to be adapted to align with a revised frequency of sessions.

B. Commitments

8. Any change to the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies would need to take into account Parties' commitments to communicate:

(a) **NDCs every five years**, 9–12 months in advance of the relevant session of the CMA. While a change to the current annual frequency of CMA sessions may not affect Parties' commitment to submit their NDCs every five years, an opportunity may be lost to build momentum for new NDCs if CMA sessions were held less frequently;

(b) **Long-term low-emission development strategies**. While any such change is not foreseen to affect Parties' commitment to communicate such strategies, it may reduce the opportunities of the CMA to invite Parties to align the submission of those strategies with their communication of NDCs;

(c) **Biennial information under Article 9, paragraph 5, of the Paris Agreement**. Since 2020, developed country Parties have been requested, and other Parties that provide resources encouraged, to submit biennial communications of information on financial resources provided to developing country Parties, which is compiled into a synthesis report by the secretariat for consideration by the COP and the CMA. Any change to the frequency of sessions would necessitate adjustments to this biennial submission cycle and to the timing of the preparation of the synthesis report and its consideration by the governing bodies.

III. Possible ways forward

9. **One identified option is maintaining the annual cycle of sessions of the governing bodies and/or postponing discussions on changing the frequency**. Some Parties emphasized in their submissions the necessity of maintaining the annual cycle of sessions of the governing bodies given the significant workload arising from the Paris Agreement, noting also that maintaining political momentum is critical for achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. Some Parties proposed that further consideration of the matter be postponed until at least 2028 or even after 2030 so that discussions can be informed by lessons learned from implementing the Paris Agreement, with Parties also noting that, with 2020–2030 being a critical period for the implementation of current and future mandates, and the urgency of raising climate ambition and addressing ongoing climate challenges, annual sessions of the governing bodies are required for the time being.

10. With regard to **changing the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies**, the following options have been identified:

(a) Reflecting the five-year cycles of the GST and communication of NDCs. One Party proposed that reducing the frequency of sessions of the governing bodies could be conducive to advancing technical work under the Paris Agreement and reducing unnecessary burden on Parties and the secretariat, suggesting that sessions of the governing bodies could be convened in alignment with the five-year cycles of the GST and NDCs, possibly with smaller-scale sessions strategically held during that five-year period. Whether this would have any implications for the frequency of sessions of the subsidiary bodies would need to be considered;

(b) Convening sessions of the governing bodies on an ad hoc basis. One Party proposed that sessions of the governing bodies could be convened only when there is political imperative to do so. This option would require the subsidiary bodies to take on more responsibilities between sessions of the governing bodies and high-level events could be convened at sessions of the subsidiary bodies, for example;

(c) Enhancing the role of the subsidiary bodies and the Bureau of the governing bodies. If convening their sessions less frequently, the governing bodies could assign additional responsibilities to the subsidiary bodies and the Bureau. For example, the subsidiary bodies could consider the reports of and provide guidance to the constituted bodies. For matters that remain under the responsibility of the governing bodies, extraordinary sessions could be convened that focus on those matters only. This option would require the continued convening of two sessions of the subsidiary bodies annually.
