



International Panel  
for Sustainable  
Resource Management



## Setting Priorities for 2008 - 2009

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International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management  
Rome, Italy, 19-20 May 2008

## 1. Introduction

The overall objective of the International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management (Resource Panel) is to provide independent scientific assessments on the environmental impacts from the use of resources (both renewable and non-renewable) over the full life cycle. The work of the Panel contributes to a better understanding of how to reduce these impacts by decoupling resource use and environmental impact from economic growth. It takes into account economic development, resource productivity and supply security issues.

The first meetings of the Panel and Steering Committee, held in Budapest, November 8-9, 2007, resulted in the identification of a number of topics for which small groups of Panel members (scoping groups) agreed to explore terms of references and submit proposals for consideration by the Panel in its next meeting.

The **following topics** were identified:

1. Scientific understanding of decoupling and resource productivity and related methodologies and indicators
2. Scientific prioritization of products and resources from an environmental sustainability point of view
3. Scientific assessment of global metal flows from a sustainable management perspective
4. Scientific assessment of biofuels from a sustainable resource management perspective
5. Institution building and social learning
6. Conceptual framework for sustainable resource management
7. Scientific assessment of freshwater resources from a sustainable management perspective.

The Secretariat has drafted and distributed a template for reporting, has been in regular contact with the group leaders, as well as with the Panel and Steering Committee chairs. To date (May 9, 2008) five proposals have been received, with various levels of detail or consensus among members. None of the groups have so far presented a final draft proposal. The text in this paper is to be seen as a work in progress report, where changes are still possible before and during the Rome meeting.

This paper presents a proposal from the Secretariat for **priority issues to address** in 2008/2009, based upon a first analysis of the proposals received.

Both the Panel and the Steering Committee are requested to provide their feedback, which will provide valuable guidance to the Secretariat, which having heard all views will allocate - where necessary and justified - appropriate funds in the limits of availability to the **working groups** and finalise working arrangements with the working group leaders. The working groups are then expected to report in the next meeting of the Panel, to be held in Santa Barbara, 19-21 November, 2008. Working group leaders are requested to pay in particular attention to the geographical balance in the composition of their groups.

Other groups (**scoping groups**) on issues already identified may continue their work, formulating and finetuning their proposals for consideration in next meetings. New groups may be formed for new emerging issues, possibly resulting from the discussion about the paper identifying topics for 2010 and beyond *UNEP/IRM/RP/0805/03*).

## 2. Priority issues work plan 2008 - 2009

In line with remarks made by participants in Panel and Steering Committee meetings in Budapest, the Secretariat feels that the number of topics to be selected for 2008 - 2009 has to be limited. The Panel is new, has yet to gradually explore its working arrangements and find its place.

The Panel and its Steering Committee might therefore consider to concentrating the 2008/2009 work on a maximum of **three priority issues**. Based upon the interest indicated in the Budapest meetings and the progress made by the various groups<sup>1</sup>, the following three topics might be considered as such (requiring reports to be drafted before Santa Barbara).

### 1. Biofuels

The work aims to improve the analytical basis for sound decision making towards more sustainable production and use of biomass for bioenergy purposes, at the international, national and regional level. It builds on the existing knowledge on the main issues and challenges, and addresses life cycle based environmental impacts (including land use and water use). The work will benefit from a comparison of existing life cycle analyses of selected feedstocks and pathways, and from an identification of the most relevant life cycle impact assessment indicators.

The group will present its proposals in the Rome meeting, followed by a discussion which is expected to provide clarity about the contents and timelines of the deliverables, taking into account the added value of the Panel's work among the multitude of other studies on this issue.

The Panel may wish to consider the following questions or issues to address to the working group:

#### ***Overall level of ambition:***

*1. the working group may wish to discuss the balance between aiming at filling knowledge gaps and at providing a solid and authoritative assessment of existing studies, in particular focusing on the macro level*

#### ***Scope***

*2. the working group may wish to focus its work on second and third generation bio fuels, possibly including the potential use of organic waste components for bio energy production, as well as more generic sustainability concerns related to second and third generation bio fuels*

#### ***Synergies with other projects***

*3. the working group may wish to identify ways and means of at the one hand achieving synergies with other projects, in particular the SCOPE initiative, while at the other hand safeguarding the visibility of the Panel's identity (for which biofuels most likely will be one of the first outputs).*

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 3 and annex A for details of all topics

## **2. Metals**

The work aims to improve the analytical base for sound decision making towards more sustainable extraction and production of metals and their recycling. The work will focus on supply security as well as on the related environmental issues while integrating economic aspects and social concerns. The group will indicate how environmental and resource protection can be combined with anticipated economic development in industrial and (in particular) developing countries.

The group will present its proposals in the Rome meeting, followed by a discussion which is expected to provide clarity about the contents and timelines of the deliverables, taking into account the added value of the Panel's work in connection with the work of, for instance, OECD, G8 and e-waste.

The Panel may wish to consider the following questions or issues to address to the working group:

### ***Overall level of ambition***

*1. the working group may wish to discuss how to balance the issue of 'getting the data right' and the need to provide authoritative assessment on the (environmental, economic and social) needs and benefits of metal recycling*

### ***Overall scope***

*2. the working group may wish to focus its work on environmental and development issues, with security of supply and economic considerations, and decide on a broad scope or, as proposed, a focus on a few number of essential metals (essential for sustainable development).*

### ***Synergies with other projects***

*3. the working group may wish to identify ways and means of at the one hand achieving synergies with other projects, in particular the OECD, G8 (3R) and e-waste programmes, while at the other hand safeguarding the visibility of the Panel's identity*

## **3. Prioritisation**

The work aims to review existing prioritization studies and other work relevant to the prioritization of products and resources and to come up with summary conclusions, as well as an evaluation and discussion of these studies. Questions that will be answered include what are the most important consumption categories and product groups in terms of their contribution to environmental impacts, what is the variation across countries, and what can be said about newly developed and developing countries?

The group will briefly present its proposals in the Rome meeting, followed by a discussion which is expected to provide clarity about the contents and timelines of the deliverables, taking into account the results of the successful workshop held in Paris, 25 April 2008, and the scope of the eventual follow up workshop in November, in cooperation with US EPA.

The Panel may wish to consider the following questions or issues to address to the working group:

#### ***Overall level of ambition***

*1. the working group may wish to discuss whether to aim at establishing an authoritative assessment of product or resource priorities at the global and/or regional level.*

#### ***Overall scope***

*2. the working group may wish to focus its work primarily on environmental and development issues, taking into account economic considerations, and decide on a broad scope of clusters (such as food, housing, mobility) or more specific priorities within these clusters.*

#### ***Synergies with other projects***

*3. the working group may wish to identify ways and means of achieving synergies with other projects, in particular the Marrakech Process (see UNEP/IRM/RP/0805/03).*

### **4. Crosscutting issues**

#### **4.1 Decoupling**

The work on **decoupling** is the overall basis for the work of the Panel. A clear and authoritative understanding of the concept is needed, so that it can be used as orientation for all Panel assessments and all other outputs. A first draft report before the Santa Barbara meeting would be appreciated.

The Panel may wish to consider the following questions or issues to address to the working group:

#### ***Overall level of ambition***

*1. the working group may wish to discuss how to optimize the expected publicity and on how to turn this in a more widely shared 'sense of urgency' for resource efficiency or resource productivity in general, thereby also raising awareness of the issue of sustainable consumption and production;*

#### ***Scope***

*2. the working group may wish to define how broad decoupling will be approached: ranging from resource efficiency in its most strict sense (material consumption per unit of GDP, a broader meaning (environmental impact per unit of GDP) or the most broadest meaning (happiness/wellbeing and sustainable rather than environmental costs, including the social pillar of sustainability).*

#### ***Synergies with other projects***

*3. the working group may wish to see how to link with UNEP's assessment work on resource efficiency (such as GEO) as well as the ongoing Marrakech Process, in particular by contributing to work on to quantitative assessments and indicators.*

## **4.2 Institution building and social learning**

The tasks related to **institution building and social learning** may be seen as crosscutting issues for a much wider audience (and expertise) than the Resource Panel, among others including the Marrakech Task Force on Education. The insights should be used for outreach and dissemination of results once the Panel has developed its knowledge base in the years to come. The Panel may wish to ask the members of the group to remain available for providing their advice to UNEP for its related work on institution building and social learning on the issues of resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production.

## **4.3 Conceptual framework**

The work on the **conceptual framework** has not yet started. This work stream goes per definition beyond assessments and would have to follow (chronologically) the decoupling paper. The Panel may wish to consider the topic for its 2009/2010 work plan, possibly with a view to providing inputs to the upcoming thematic cycle on sustainable consumption and production of the Commission for Sustainable Development (*see UNEP/IRM/RP/0805/03*).

## **4.4 Water efficiency**

The Panel may wish to discuss feasibility of this important topic in one of its next meetings.