Annex 4
Proposed approach to deliver future Global Wetland Outlooks

1. The Global Wetland Outlook (GWO) is a flagship publication of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) under the Convention on Wetlands. As part of the 2023-2025 STRP work plan (Task 5.3), the STRP was tasked with preparing a report for the Standing Committee outlining a conceptual framework and a detailed plan for future editions of the GWO. The scope of this work includes:
   - Defining the purpose of the GWO as a flagship product under the Convention, aligned with the goals of the Strategic Plan, and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs);
   - Developing a structured approach to facilitate the delivery of future GWOs, considering methodological frameworks, timeframes, resource needs (including financial requirements), communication strategies, and information sources.

   Lessons learned from the 2018 GWO and the Special Edition produced under the 2019-2021 work plan, along with insights from other global assessments, have been incorporated into the current plan.

2. The STRP constituted a working group for this task, led by Dr. Hugh Robertson (STRP Chair) and Dr. Ritesh Kumar (Technical Expert). The working group met twice virtually and presented an outline approach for future GWOs during the STRP's intersessional meeting in September 2024. Feedback from these discussions has been incorporated into this report.

Purpose of Global Wetland Outlook

3. The GWO was first requested by Resolution XII.5, which called upon the STRP to update and expand Briefing Note 7: State of the World's Wetlands and Their Services to People. The resolution encouraged the STRP and the Secretary-General, subject to resource availability, to explore ways to improve and update the GWO as a periodic flagship report of the Convention, contributing to the Global Biodiversity Outlook of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The primary purpose of the GWO[1] is to increase understanding of the value of wetlands, offering recommendations to ensure their conservation, wise use, and recognition of their benefits by all.[2]

4. In line with practices adopted by other Conventions and MEAs that feature similar flagship publications, it is recommended that the purpose of the GWO be broadened to fully realize the intent of Resolution XII.5. It is proposed that:

   "the GWO as a flagship publication of the Convention on Wetlands:
   a) Provide an evidence-based summary of the [global] status of wetlands and the drivers and pressures of adverse change in these ecosystems.
   b) Examine the different ways wetlands are being conserved and managed in various regions of the world and the challenges experienced.
   c) Periodically tracks progress on achieving various indicators outlined in the Strategic Plan.
   d) Offer policymakers recommendations from the STRP for effective wetland conservation and wise use."

[1] As mentioned on the Global Wetland Outlook page: https://www.global-wetland-outlook.ramsar.org/.
[2] Over the last 12 months, the GWO page has been visited over 20,000 times, and the report has been downloaded over 6,000 times.

Scope of the Global Wetland Outlook

5. The 2018 and 2021 editions of the GWO have adopted a global scope of analysis, with the 2018 edition consisting of chapters on status and trends in wetlands, drivers of change, and response options. However, the GWO provides limited insights into the implementation status of the Convention, including the ecological character of Wetlands of International Importance and the condition of wetlands reported by Contracting Parties. The 2021 edition also highlighted the percentage of Wetlands of International Importance affected by agriculture-based practices.

6. Historically, there have been efforts to provide wetlands-specific assessments derived from global assessments. In 1999, a review of wetland resources and priorities for wetlands inventory was published by the Convention on Wetlands[3]. The Millenium Ecosystem Assessment: Wetlands and Water Synthesis[4] was published in 2005, focusing on the future sustainability of wetlands and water resources. Further, in response to Resolution VIII.34, the STRP participated in the Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture, as carried out by the International Water Management Institute.[5] The TEEB-Wetlands and Water[6] built on the TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity) framework to enhance understanding of the ecosystem service values of water and wetlands, encouraging improved decision-making and greater business commitment to their conservation, investment and wise use.

7. To fulfil the purpose of the GWO, it is proposed that future editions encompass:
   a) **Global assessments**: Evaluating the status, trends, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and human well-being connections of wetlands at a global scale. Regional assessments would provide key components of the global evaluation.
   b) **Thematic assessments**: Focusing on contemporary issues such as wetlands as nature-based solutions).
   c) **Methodological assessments:** Examining the availability and application of methods such as Earth observation for wetland monitoring.[7]

8. The global assessment should also track the implementation of the Convention's Strategic Plan goals, targets and indicators, supplementing information from national reports with additional scientific evidence.

Approaches of other Conventions and MEAs

9. Various MEAs and science-policy platforms, such as the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)[8] and the Intergovernmental Panel on

[3] Finlayson CM and Spiers AG (ed.) 1999. Global review of wetland resources and priorities for wetlands inventory. Supervising Scientist Report 144 / Wetlands International Publication 53, Supervising Scientist, Canberra

[4] Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005. ECOSYSTEMS AND HUMAN WELL-BEING: WETLANDS AND WATER Synthesis. World Resources Institute, Washington, DC.

[5] Molden D (ed), Water for food, water for life: a comprehensive assessment of water management in agriculture. Earthscan, London, UK, pp 57-89.

[6] Russi D., ten Brink P., Farmer A., Badura T., Coates D., Förster J., Kumar R. and Davidson N. (2013) The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for Water and Wetlands. IEEP, London and Brussels; Convention on Wetlands Secretariat, Gland.

[7] Some of the technical reports produced by the STRP and available at: https://www.ramsar.org/publications would fall under this category.

[8] IPBES (2018): IPBES Guide on the production of assessments. Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Bonn, Germany. 44 pages available at: https://www.ipbes.net/guide-production-assessments.

Climate Change (IPCC),[9] have established structured assessment processes. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the approaches adopted by other Conventions. It is proposed that the GWO adopt key elements from these approaches, including a clear assessment purpose, a detailed scoping phase, a broad team of experts, an explicit review process, and a communications strategy for the uptake of findings.

10. The review further suggests that the GWO follow an assessment process that includes:
    - A clear assessment purpose, including evaluation of the Convention's implementation;
    - A detailed scoping phase, approved by relevant decision-making bodies;
    - A broad team of experts to undertake the assessment;
    - An explicit and transparent review process;
    - The development of a Summary for Policymakers in consultation with Contracting Parties;
    - A communication strategy to support the uptake and application of the assessment's findings.

Type of product and frequency

11. The 2018 GWO was the first global assessment to provide detailed evidence of the state of the world's wetlands. The scope of the 2018 GWO was similar to that of the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment: Wetlands and Water Synthesis published in 2005. The 2021 Special Edition summarized new information on wetland trends, offering lessons for the wise use and protection of wetlands. A second special issue, focusing on the financial costs of wetland loss and degradation and the investment required for wetland restoration, is expected in 2025.

12. Future options for the GWO include:
    a) **Global Assessments** published every nine years, providing a comprehensive review of the status and trends in wetlands, their drivers of degradation, and response options. These assessments would align with the timeline of three Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings and the Strategic Plan cycle;
    b) **Thematic or Methodological Assessments** published every three years, focusing on contemporary issues or methodologies relevant to wetland conservation, wise use, and monitoring. These topics can be discerned from the assessments published by other Conventions and MEAs, based on a prioritized task of the STRP work plan.

Process

13. The delivery of the GWO is currently managed as a task within the STRP work plan. As a result, only STRP members and observers have contributed to drafting the report, supported by consultants working under their close guidance. While this approach offers advantages such as cost-efficiency, process control, and adherence to timelines, the GWO would benefit from a more structured assessment process. This would involve strategically assembling a diverse team of experts and incorporating capacity-building and outreach elements to enhance the report's depth and global relevance.

Composition of the assessment team

14. In previous editions, the GWO assessment teams have been composed primarily of STRP members, with two acting as Coordinating Lead Authors. While this arrangement has ensured

[9] IPCC Procedures for the Preparation, Review, Acceptance, Adoption, Approval and Publication of IPCC Reports available at: https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/09/ipcc-principles-appendix-a-final.pdf.

timely delivery and process control, the assessment could benefit from a broader pool of experts. For example, processes like IPBES have included capacity-building by incorporating young and early-career researchers as research fellows. This approach would expand the GWO's depth and offer a more diverse set of perspectives.

15. It is recommended that future GWO assessment teams be composed as follows:[10]
    a) Coordinating Lead Authors (CLA): Responsible for delivering the overall assessment, managing timelines, and producing the Summary for Policymakers.
    b) Lead Authors (LA): Tasked with carrying out the assessment per the established framework, selected from an open call and including STRP members.
    c) Contributing Authors (CA): Experts invited to provide technical inputs or graphics on specific subjects covered in the assessment.
    d) Review Editors (RE): Ensuring that all substantive review comments are considered and that controversial issues are adequately addressed.
    e) Fellows: Early-career researchers or professionals assisting the Lead Authors, appointed through an open call to promote capacity-building.

Phasing of the assessment

16. Currently, the GWO assessment is launched based on a task description approved as part of the STRP work plan. The STRP develops the detailed table of contents in the first meeting, which then guides the development of the report. To enhance the development process, it is recommended to adopt a phased assessment approach, as used in other global assessments, to ensure structured steps and adequate review mechanisms.

17. The proposed phased approach includes:

    Phase 1: Scoping – A scoping document will be produced for each GWO production cycle to guide the assessment process. This document should outline:
    (1) Policy-relevant questions;
    (2) Geographic boundaries of the assessment, if applicable;
    (3) Rationale for the assessment, including its potential impact;
    (4) Utility of the assessment, including the intended end-users;
    (5) Methodological framework and assessment approach;
    (6) Chapter outline, with a brief explanation of each chapter;
    (7) Key datasets to be utilized;
    (8) Partnerships essential for delivering the assessment;
    (9) Process and timetable;
    (10) Communication and outreach strategies;
    (11) Capacity development, detailing the skills and expertise needed to complete the assessment; and
    (12) Budgetary requirements.

    It is recommended that the scoping document be developed by the STRP as part of its work plan for the next triennium and submitted to the Standing Committee for approval.

    Phase 2: Assessment – The assessment team, comprising the CLA, LA, and Fellows, will evaluate the state of knowledge. It is recommended that the Chair and Vice-Chair, in consultation with the Secretariat, appoint the CLA. The LA may be constituted through an open call by the Secretariat and include both STRP members and external subject-matter experts (through

[10] This structure has been used in Millenium Ecosystem Assessment: Wetlands and Water Synthesis.

specific invitations). In forming the assessment team, it is important to ensure gender, regional, and disciplinary diversity. Similarly, Fellows should be selected through an open call to assist the LA in conducting the assessment and to contribute to capacity-building.

A key aspect of the assessment will be effectively communicating the confidence experts have in the findings. Established practices, such as those used by IPBES and IPCC, for conveying confidence in qualitative terms (see Appendix 2 for an illustrative example from IPBES) could be adopted, particularly for chapter summaries and the Summary for Policymakers (SPM). It is also good practice to maintain traceability of assessment findings and confidence statements by providing references to relevant sections and evidence within the assessment. The development of the assessment should include the preparation of an SPM, which provides a high-level synthesis in non-technical language for decision-makers.

Suggested steps for finalizing the assessment:

(1) **Zero-Order Draft (ZOD)**: The ZOD will include an annotated outline based on the scoping document. At this stage, Contributing Authors will be identified, and key datasets, analyses, and examples needed for the assessment will be determined. Timelines for the assessment will be agreed upon with the LA. This draft should be developed within the first six months of the triennium.

(2) **First-Order Draft (FOD)**: The FOD will have approximately 70% of the assessment completed, along with initial drafts of chapter executive summaries. Necessary graphics will also be identified at this stage. Review Editors (RE) will propose a list of experts to review this draft. The FOD should be completed by the end of the first year of the triennium.

(3) **Second-Order Draft (SOD)**: The SOD will include the full text and graphics and incorporate feedback from the FOD review. The draft SPM will also be developed at this stage. The SOD should be circulated for external review by governments and observers. This draft should be completed by the end of the second year of the triennium.

(4) **Third-Order Draft (TOD)**: The TOD will contain the final text and graphics and address comments from governments and observers on the SOD and SPM. The finalized SPM should be presented at the next Standing Committee meeting, and a decision made on whether to submit a resolution based on the assessment findings to the next Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP). The TOD should be finalized within six months of the completion of the SOD.

Phase 3: Review and Editing – Concurrent with the assessment, it is recommended that the GWO undergo independent review and editing. The ZOD and FOD should be reviewed internally by the STRP and observer organizations. The SOD and SPM should be sent to Contracting Parties for review and feedback, with a clear mechanism for incorporating comments. The RE will ensure that all comments are adequately addressed throughout the review process.

Phase 4: Communications and Outreach – In this phase, the GWO and SPM will be disseminated according to a communications strategy developed in consultation with the Communication, Capacity Building, Education, Participation, and Awareness (CEPA) Oversight Panel. The impact of the GWO can be amplified through the following mechanisms:

- Collaborating with other Conventions, MEAs, International Organization Partners (IOPs), and Regional Centers to promote the use of GWO findings;
- Sharing identified knowledge and data gaps with the scientific community and research funding agencies to encourage further research and monitoring;
- Partnering with universities and research institutions to integrate GWO findings into academic curricula and engage students in wetland research;

- Working with Contracting Parties through CEPA and capacity-building activities to promote regional and national wetland assessments based on GWO findings;
- Producing scientific publications on key aspects of the GWO, authored by experts involved in the assessment, and making these available via the Convention's website;
- Highlighting successful wetland conservation projects and initiatives as case studies to demonstrate the practical application of GWO recommendations;
- Organizing interactive webinars and workshops to disseminate the GWO findings and foster dialogue among policymakers, scientists, and practitioners;
- Using social media campaigns to raise awareness of the GWO findings, engaging a wider audience and promoting wetland conservation; and
- Ensuring that the GWO report and summaries are available in multiple languages to increase accessibility and reach.

Summary of Policy Makers

18. It is recommended that each GWO include a Summary for Policymakers (SPM) that distills the key insights and recommendations of the report into clear, actionable messages for decision-makers. The Coordinating Lead Authors would draft the SPM, which would then be presented to the Standing Committee for approval. If necessary, a resolution based on the GWO's findings could be presented at the Conference of the Parties.

Proposed topics for future GWOs

20. The next issue of the GWO is recommended to be a Global Assessment similar to the 2018 Assessment. The assessment should comprehensively review the status and trends in wetland conditions, the direct and indirect drivers of degradation, and response options. It should be built on regional assessments. For methodological consistency, the framework used in the 2018 assessment may also be used as a basis for this assessment (including relevant future updates, such as revisions to the Wetlands Trend Index and Ecological Character Status Index). Additionally, the assessment should include an evaluation of the Fourth Strategic Plan 2016-2024 and establish baselines for targets set in the forthcoming Fifth Strategic Plan.[11]

21. Future GWO assessments should focus on comprehensive global reviews, similar to the 2018 edition, evaluating the status and trends of wetland conditions, drivers of degradation, and response options. This may include:
    a) Wetlands as Nature-based Solutions.
    b) Transformational change for Wetlands wise use.
    c) Wetlands and Culture.
    d) Climate Change and Wetland Resilience.
    e) Invasive Species and their effects on Wetlands.
    f) Wetlands and Disease (within the One-Health framework).

Collaboration with other MEAs

22. It is recommended that the Convention on Wetlands Secretariat collaborate with other MEAs and international platforms to produce assessments similar to the GWO. The collaboration could aim to improve efficiency in data and knowledge generation collection, share expertise, including technical support-related processes, and share best practices in assessment production and communication.

[11] This report is being prepared at the time of drafting this proposal.

STRP 2026-2028 work plan

23. The proposed future priorities for the STRP have been outlined in the draft resolution submitted to the Standing Committee. These include the publication of a Global Wetland Outlook (2028), which will deliver a global assessment following the proposed scope and timeline.

Data collation and technical support

24. The GWO should be produced following a comprehensive data collection, collation, and synthesis system to ensure the robustness of the assessment. It is recommended that the Secretariat provide a dedicated Technical Support Unit (TSU) to provide technical support to the GWO. The purpose of the technical support unit would be to:
    a) Facilitate the work: The TSU will provide logistical support, such as organizing workshops and consultations.
    b) Provide scientific input: The TSU will add scientific input to the assessment work as needed.
    c) Ensure transparency: The TSU will ensure that the work is implemented transparently and inclusively and that it follows any rules and procedures laid down by the Standing Committee.
    d) Provide feedback: Establish feedback mechanisms to gather insights and recommendations from stakeholders on the effectiveness of the data collection process and the assessment outcomes.

25. Hosting the TSU with an external organization may be considered, but in the interim, it is recommended that the Secretariat appoint a Programme Officer dedicated to supporting the GWO process. This officer would be responsible for logistical support, data analysis, maintaining the assessment's database, and assisting with the final publication and outreach.

Resources

26. Adequate resources should be allocated to ensure the successful delivery of the GWO in the next triennium. This includes funding for the Programme Officer, at least one in-person author meeting, and the costs associated with the production and publication of the GWO and SPM.

27. Additional resources should also be allocated to support the communications and outreach efforts associated with the GWO. These activities are critical to ensuring the GWO's findings are effectively communicated to a wide audience and have the desired impact on wetland conservation efforts globally.

28. The budget allocated for the GWO in the next triennium should cover all essential costs, including personnel, author meetings, publication, and outreach activities. Sufficient funding will be critical to ensure the successful delivery and impact of the GWO.

Appendix 1
An overview of assessment products published by different Conventions and MEAs

Name of Convention / MEA	Name of assessment report	Purpose	Publication frequency	Assessment process
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO)	Provide a summary of the status of biological diversity and an analysis of the steps the global community takes to ensure that biodiversity is conserved and used sustainably and that benefits arising from using genetic resources are shared equitably.	Five years, first published in 2001	Guided by an advisory group. Assessment by authors selected through an open call.
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	World Water Development Report	Offer an authoritative and comprehensive assessment of the world's freshwater resources' overall state, use, and management. It aims to provide decision-makers with tools to formulate and implement sustainable water policies.	From 2003 through 2012, the UN WWDR was produced and released every three years. As of 2014, it transformed into an annual thematic report focused on a different strategic water issue each year. The theme of each annual UN WWDR is harmonized with that of World Water Day (22 March) and provides the knowledge base for related celebrations, events, and discussions throughout the year.	Coordinated by UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme on behalf of the UN Water family.
UN Environment (UNEP)	Global Environment Outlook (GEO)	To keep the world environmental situation under review to periodically inform and support collective and individual action by Member States and stakeholders while strengthening the science-policy interface of the United Nations Environment Programme;	Launched in 1995, published every four years	The assessment process is presided over by a Multidisciplinary Expert Scientific Advisory Group. Assessment done by lead and coordinating lead authors selected through an open call. Scoping document and a summary for policymakers are reviewed and endorsed by representatives of Member States at ad hoc open-ended meetings

Name of Convention / MEA	Name of assessment report	Purpose	Publication frequency	Assessment process
Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)	Several assessments	To perform regular and timely assessments of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services and their interlinkages, which include comprehensive thematic, global and regional assessments	11 completed assessments, each assessment takes up to four years, with the first year for scoping and subsequently 2-3 years for assessment	Four stages: a) Request and scope, b) Expert evaluation, c) Approval and acceptance of final assessment report, and d) Use of final assessment findings. Assessment is guided by a Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and coordinated by Assessment Chairs. For each assessment section/ chapter, Coordinating Lead Authors and Lead Authors are selected/nominated. Research Fellows are also appointed to support capacity development.
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)	Global Land Outlook (GLO)	To communicate and raise awareness of evidence-based, policy-relevant information and trends to various stakeholders, including national governments formulating their responses to commitments to better manage and restore land resources, including the SDGs and associated targets, such as Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). The GLO thematic reports provide a global analysis and offer practical solutions that are relevant and timely to address specific land management challenges and opportunities in selected geographical and socio-economic contexts.	The first edition in 2017, and the second in 2022 (along with regional reports and thematic reports)	Drafted by a team of lead authors and contributors; overall assessment produced by GLO team of coordinators, co-authors and research assistants, working under a GLO Steering Committee

Name of Convention / MEA	Name of assessment report	Purpose	Publication frequency	Assessment process
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)	Assessment Report	Prepare comprehensive Assessment Reports about knowledge on climate change, its causes, potential impacts, and response options. The IPCC also produces Special Reports, which assess a specific issue, and Methodology Reports, which provide practical guidelines for preparing greenhouse gas inventories.	Every 5 - 7 years. The first comprehensive assessment report was published in 1990.	Each report starts with a scoping meeting to develop a draft outline. Experts nominated by member governments, Observer Organizations, and the Bureau, as well as those selected by the relevant Bureau, prepare a draft outline of the report for the üanel. Based on the report of the scoping meeting, the Panel decides whether work should continue on preparing the report and agrees on its scope, outline and work plan, including schedule and budget. Member governments, Observer Organizations, and the Bureau (Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs) of the Working Group or Task Force producing the report then draw up lists of experts from which the relevant Bureau or Bureaux select the report's authors. The Bureau may consider other experts known through their publications and work. Scientists who are nominated but not selected as authors are invited to register as expert reviewers for the report.

Appendix 2
Using a confidence assessment process

1. To ensure that the GWO is based on a rigorous evaluation of evidence, it is recommended to utilize assessment confidence frameworks[12], wherein all conclusions have a confidence term attached. These terms are derived based on examination of the quality and quantity of evidence and level of agreement within the evidence. Based on these factors, four levels of confidence are attached, namely:

    a) Well established: a comprehensive meta-analysis, other syntheses, or multiple independent studies that agree.
    b) Established but incomplete: general agreement, although only a limited number of studies exist; no comprehensive synthesis and/or existing studies that address the question imprecisely.
    c) Unresolved: multiple independent studies exist, but conclusions do not agree.
    d) Inconclusive: limited evidence, recognizing major knowledge gaps.

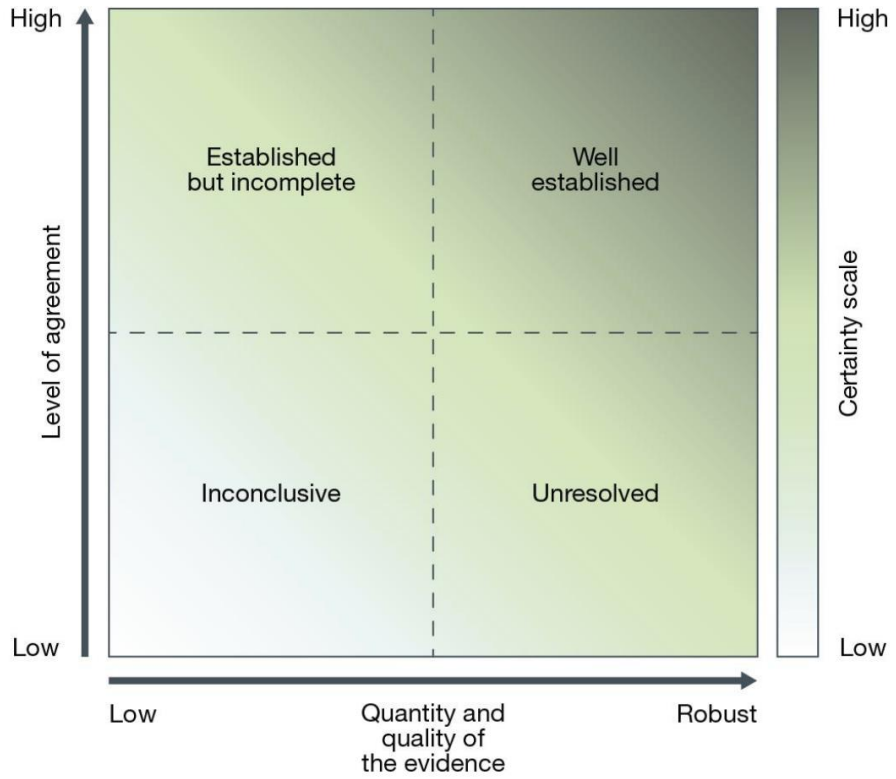

Figure SPM.A2: The four-box model for the qualitative communication of confidence. Confidence increases towards the top-right corner as suggested by the increasing strength of shading. Source: modified from Moss and Schneider (2000).[1]

[12] IPBES (2018): IPBES Assessment Guide Summary. Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Bonn, Germany. 12 pages. The IPBES Assessment Guide Summary can be viewed and downloaded at: https://www.ipbes.net/document-library-catalogue/ipbes-assessment-guide-summary.