

# The UN guardians of biodiversity

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A factfile on the IPBES, a UN-created panel with the colossal task of harvesting and distilling all available science on the health of Earth's plant and animal species and their habitats.

The purpose of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services is to inform government policymakers on the state of biodiversity, highlight dangerous trends and identify potential species-saving action.

On Friday, the body published its first report since its creation in 2012.

The IPBES was set up in the image of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which played a key role in alerting the world to mounting scientific evidence of dangerous global warming caused by humankind's burning of greenhouse gas-emitting fossil fuels.

With 124 governments signed up, the IPBES executive is based in the former west German capital Bonn.

Its president, Malaysian biologist Abdul Hamid Zakri, is backed by a bureau of nine people from all the continents.

A thousand scientists from around the world—nominated by their governments—contribute to the IPBES' work on a voluntary basis.

These experts do not conduct their own studies, but pull together syntheses of available science, and then filter them into a digestible

summary for government officials and leaders.

Issued in Kuala Lumpur, the inaugural report found that declining populations of bees, butterflies, moths, birds and other pollinators has placed major world crops at threat.

The 350-page assessment, including a 36-page summary for policymakers, was compiled by 77 experts from around the world and cited about 3,000 scientific papers.

Before release, the report was submitted to outside scientists, yielding some 10,000 comments that were assessed by 280 researchers.

Earlier this week, France's Le Monde newspaper reported that two of the authors were in the employ of agrochemical companies Bayer and Syngenta, both of which produce neonicotinoid-based pesticides suspected of being involved in a mysterious surge in bee deaths.

The body responded by saying there is no conflict of interest.

"Only by including researchers with multiple points of view, from the academic world, non-governmental organisations, governments and industrial actors, can balanced and relevant analyses can be produced and all kinds of bias avoided," it said in a statement.

Driven by resource plundering, deforestation, urbanisation, pollution and [climate change](#), species extinction is thought to be happening at least 1,000 times faster today than if there was no human presence on Earth.

Some scientists have said Earth has entered a period of mass extinction, only the sixth in the last half-billion years.

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