



STATEMENT
23 January 2007

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Follow-up to paragraph 169 of the World Summit Outcome on the institutional framework for the United Nations' environmental activities

Delivered by Dr Dean Bialek, Third Secretary, Australian Mission to the United Nations

Thank you for the opportunity to once again address the question of improving the coherence of the UN's work on environment issues. Australia found the exchange of views over the course of the first two rounds of informal consultations in 2006 extremely valuable, and my delegation would like to express its appreciation to you for having produced a useful and balanced summary of these consultations.

Together we identified several important areas of concern, including continuing environmental degradation, fragmentation of environment-related organisations and activities, and the heavy burden of annual MEA meetings and reporting requirements.

The recent Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence made several recommendations with implications for the UN's environment activities. Ambassadors, as you noted in your introductory remarks during last Thursday's session, this informal consultative process and any established to consider the recommendations of the High-level Panel should be "complementary and mutually reinforcing". We agree. But we should be mindful of the need to avoid any unnecessary duplication of effort.

Given the broad-ranging discussions we had last year, we suggest that the next logical step is to look in more detail at some of the elements around which there appeared to be general agreement. Many stressed the need for: environmental capacity-building, particularly in developing countries; strengthening scientific knowledge, assessment and coordination; and the mainstreaming of environmental issues. Some of these issues are being addressed in other fora. For example, implementation of UNEP's Bali Strategic Plan is now underway, and the UNEP Governing Council will next month consider a strategy to strengthen science.

With this in mind, we believe that this informal process is best placed to add value in considering how to better integrate environmental considerations into the UN's development activities, including project delivery through funds and programmes. We should consider carefully whether it is an effective use of resources to retain separate operational capacities within both UNDP and UNEP, given that our normative framework long ago recognised – in the concept of 'sustainable development' – the inextricable linkages between the environment and development.

Australia has argued throughout this process that the mainstreaming of environmental activities needs to begin primarily at the national level. Capacity-building in developing countries is therefore crucial. The UN's operational activities should focus on growing this capacity from the ground up, by



assisting countries to incorporate fully environmental considerations into national and regional development programs and strategies.

In short co-Chairs, we suggest that the next logical step for this group is to concentrate on those issues where it has expertise, further refine and focus its consideration of them, and attempt to develop practical and achievable approaches and solutions. To this end, we welcome your undertaking to prepare an "options paper", and encourage you to develop real proposals for reform, concentrating on those areas where the General Assembly can best add value.

We wish you well on your travels, and look forward to hearing of the outcomes.