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LIAISON GROUP OF TECHNICAL EXPERTS ON
THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE
Montreal, 10-11 April 2003

ANNOTATIONS TO THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

INTRODUCTION

Background

1. Article 20 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity established a Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) to facilitate the exchange of information on living modified organisms (LMOs) and to assist countries in the implementation of the Protocol.
2. At its first meeting, held in Montpellier from 11 to 15 December 2000, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP) recommended the development of a pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, according to defined objectives, characteristics, elements, modalities and timeframes.^{1/} ICCP mandated its Bureau to provide management oversight of the development and implementation of the pilot phase, and to draw upon appropriate technical advisory expertise to facilitate the development of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House. At its second meeting, held in Nairobi from 1 to 5 October 2001, ICCP recognized that the pilot phase had progressed in accordance with the recommendations made at its first meeting, and proposed that the future development of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House be undertaken in accordance with the second note from the Bureau on technical issues associated with the implementation of the pilot phase.^{2/} At its third meeting, held in The Hague from 22 to 26 April 2002, ICCP noted that future development of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House would be undertaken in accordance with the third technical note developed by the ICCP Bureau.^{3/}
3. Guided by the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and equity, and following the guidelines and recommendations of ICCP at its three meetings, and the advice from the ICCP Bureau, the Secretariat has implemented the pilot phase of Biosafety Clearing-House in accordance with the identified objectives.
4. The pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House has two main components: a central portal and a distributed network of national components. Although the central portal has been developed and administered by the Secretariat, with the assistance of donor funding, coordinated efforts to develop and link national components to the central portal have been limited. Given the imminent entry into force of

^{1/} UNEP/CBD/ICCP/1/9, annex I.

^{2/} UNEP/CBD/ICCP/2/15, annex, recommendation 2/8, para. 1.

^{3/} UNEP/CBD/ICCP/3/10, annex, recommendation 3/3, para. 5.

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the Protocol, and the essential nature of a national Biosafety Clearing-House component, particularly to enable governments to provide information to the Biosafety Clearing-House and to access the information available through the Biosafety Clearing-House for decision-making, the Liaison Group will be invited to consider issues relevant to the development and linkage of national components of the Biosafety Clearing-House to the central portal.

5. The modalities of the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, including reports on its activities, will be considered and decided upon by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties at its first meeting to the Protocol (COP/MOP-1), and kept under review thereafter. The Liaison Group is therefore invited to consider issues relevant to the modalities of operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House in order to provide advice to the Executive Secretary on relevant topics to be further considered by COP/MOP-1.

6. The pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House is accessible on-line at <http://bch.biodiv.org>. Version 2.0 of the pilot phase of the BCH was launched on 1 February 2003.

Anticipated outcome of the meeting

7. The recommendations of the Liaison Group will be used to assist the Executive Secretary in ongoing development of the Biosafety Clearing-House, and to assist in preparation of the paper for COP/MOP-1 on the modalities of operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

Organization of work

8. The Liaison Group will be invited to discuss issues relevant to the establishment of national components of the Biosafety Clearing-House. To facilitate these discussions, the provisional agenda organizes the issues under three substantive items, namely:

- (a) Status of implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
- (b) National experiences in using the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House; and
- (c) Discussion of requirements for establishment of national components for participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House, and associated technical issues.

9. The Liaison Group will be invited to consider the proposed organization of work as contained in annex I below. The proposal is intended to provide for an opportunity to consider, in-depth, the critical agenda items within the time frame available. The meeting will endeavour to cover all the agenda items in the plenary.

10. The meeting will take up the main substantive issues requiring detailed consideration as reflected under item 4 of the provisional agenda, taking into consideration the information provided by participants under item 3 of the provisional agenda. Working groups may be established as need arises.

11. The proposed organization of work also provides for an opportunity for participants to raise any other relevant issues and suggestions to improve the development and modalities of operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House. In light of observations and suggestions made, the Liaison Group may wish to identify strategic issues that might require further consideration by the COP/MOP.

Participants

12. The composition of the Liaison Group has been determined on the basis of the participants' demonstrated expertise and experience with the development of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House at a national level.

13. In addition to national experts, the following persons will also be invited to participate in the meeting as observers:

(a) Members of the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety;

(b) Representatives from the following intergovernmental organizations active in biosafety and/or information-exchange issues: International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), European Commission Joint Research Centre, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Documents

14. A list of documents for the meeting is attached as annex II below.

ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

15. The meeting will be held at the office of the Secretariat to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal, Canada. The meeting will be opened by the Executive Secretary of the Convention at 9 a.m. on Thursday, 10 April 2003.

ITEM 2. STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

16. Under this item, a representative of the Secretariat will give a short presentation on the status of implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House. This presentation will address the current status of the Protocol, the Protocol provisions and ICCP recommendations on implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, main features of the Biosafety Clearing-House (including the central portal and interoperability), and an overview of the ICCP/COP assessment of capacity-building needs for the BCH and Secretariat activities in this regard.

ITEM 3: NATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN USING THE PILOT PHASE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

17. Under this item, participants will be invited to give short presentations on their experiences in developing national components of the Biosafety Clearing-House, particularly focusing on (i) use of the web interface of the central portal; and (ii) establishment of interoperable national databases.

18. In addition, representatives from intergovernmental organizations active in biosafety and/or information-sharing activities will be invited to give a presentation on their experiences in cooperation between their information-exchange resources and the Biosafety Clearing-House.

ITEM 4: DISCUSSION OF REQUIREMENTS FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL COMPONENTS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE, AND ASSOCIATED TECHNICAL ISSUES

19. In considering item 4, the main substantive item of the agenda, the Liaison Group will be guided by the feedback on national experiences in using the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House that will be provided under item 3. However, without prejudice to these discussions, it is anticipated that the following issues may merit special consideration by the experts:

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Use of the web interface of the central portal

- (a) Design of the data input system using the Web interface of the central portal;
- (b) Role of the national focal point for the Biosafety Clearing-House;

Establishment of interoperable databases

- (c) Further development of Biosafety Clearing-House interoperability guidelines (including information management policies, and procedures for receiving and making information available using the web service);
- (d) Quality-assurance procedures, including standardization of validation procedures within partner organizations and interoperable national databases;

Design of the central portal to facilitate ease of use

- (e) Continued development and use of common formats for reporting (e.g. decisions, national legislations, points of contact, focal points, summaries of risk assessments etc.), including the use of mandatory information fields;
- (f) Continued development and implementation of the controlled vocabulary and thesaurus (currently used to aid in metadata translation of records held in the Biosafety Clearing-House databases);
- (g) Continued development of the Biosafety Clearing-House web service to include a feedback mechanism to determine the status of a previously sent request (e.g. call-back or pooling methods) and the need to adhere to an XML Business Process Language standard to assist in the implementation of interoperability;

Capacity-building needs

- (h) Mechanisms to meet the capacity-building needs of countries with respect to the BCH, particularly with respect to the development of templates and models to assist Governments in developing their own national biosafety databases that will be interoperable with the Central portal;
- (i) Mechanisms to encourage country participation in the development of the pilot phase, and to provide feedback on the ways countries use the Biosafety Clearing-House (central portal, regional nodes, national databases, non-Web-based information-sharing systems, etc); and

Ongoing collaboration

- (j) Mechanisms to promote collaboration between information-technology experts, Biosafety Clearing-House national focal points and partner organizations through, for example, the use of electronic discussion groups to facilitate cooperation and discussion.

20. The Liaison Group is also invited to consider financial and technological resource requirements under each of these topics, and where possible resource implications should be reflected in recommendations made by the expert meeting.

21. Participants may also propose and discuss additional issues not necessarily anticipated by the Secretariat.

ITEM 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The Liaison Group will be invited to formulate its general conclusions and recommendations in line with the issues identified in the agenda.

ITEM 6: OTHER MATTERS

23. Under this item, participants will be invited to raise other matters related to the subject matter of the meeting.

ITEM 7: CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

24. It is expected that the meeting will be closed at 5 p.m. on Friday, 11 April 2003.

Annex I

**PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE MEETING OF TECHNICAL EXPERTS
ON THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE**

Thursday, 10 April 2003

9 a.m.—930 a.m.	Opening of the meeting (item 1)
930 a.m.—1030 a.m.	Status of implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House (Item 2)
1030 p.m.—noon	National experiences in using the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House (item 3)
Noon—1 p.m.	Lunch break
1 p.m. —3 p.m.	National experiences in using the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House (<i>continued</i>)
3 p.m. —5 p.m.	Discussion of requirements for establishment of national components for participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House, and associated technical issues (item 4)

Friday, 11 April 2003

9 a.m.—noon	Discussion of requirements for establishment of national components for participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House, and associated technical issues (<i>continued</i>)
Noon—1 p.m.	Lunch break
1 p.m.—4 p.m.	Conclusion and recommendations (item 5)
4 p.m.—5 p.m.	Other matters (item 6)
5 p.m.	Closure of the meeting (item 7)

Annex II

**LIST OF DOCUMENTS FOR THE EXPERT MEETING
ON THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE**

Working documents

- UNEP/CBD/BCH/LG-MTE/1/1 Provisional agenda
UNEP/CBD/BCH/LG-MTE/1/1/Add.1 Annotations to the provisional agenda

Information documents

- UNEP/CBD/BCH/LG-MTE/1/INF/1 Information for participants
ICCP Bureau note 1 4/ First note from the Bureau on technical issues associated with the implementation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House (30 March 2001)
ICCP Bureau note 2 Second note from the Bureau on technical issues associated with the implementation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House (10 October 2001)
ICCP Bureau note 3 Third note from the Bureau on technical issues associated with the development of the Pilot Phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House (27 May 2002)
UNEP/CBD/ICCP/1/9, annex I 5/ Report of the ICCP at its first meeting (11-15 December 2000), excerpt on information-sharing and the Biosafety Clearing-House
UNEP/CBD/ICCP/2/15, rec. 2/8 6/ Report of the ICCP at its second meeting (1-5 October 2001), excerpt on information-sharing and the Biosafety Clearing-House
UNEP/CBD/ICCP/3/10, rec. 3/3 7/ Report of the ICCP at its third meeting (22-26 April 2002), excerpt on information-sharing and the Biosafety Clearing-House

4/ <http://bch.biodiv.org/Pilot/News/Notes.aspx>
5/ <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.asp?wg=ICCP-01>
6/ <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.asp?wg=ICCP-02>
7/ <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.asp?wg=ICCP-03>