



Convention on Biological Diversity

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/5
4 August 2014

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY SERVING AS THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY

Seventh meeting

Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, 29 September-3 October 2014

Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, CONVENTIONS AND INITIATIVES

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its sixth meeting, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (COP-MOP), in its decision BS-VI/6, welcomed the Executive Secretary's cooperation with, inter alia, the Green Customs Initiative, the World Trade Organization, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Plant Protection Convention and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention), and underlined the contribution of cooperation and coordination among relevant organizations, multilateral agreements and initiatives to the effective implementation of the Protocol and the Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety for the period 2011–2020, adopted at the fifth meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, decision BS-V/16.

2. Under focal area 5 of the Strategic Plan, the Parties adopted a strategic objective on outreach and cooperation with an expected impact to increase support from and collaboration with relevant organizations, conventions and initiatives for the implementation of the Protocol. In this strategic objective, there is an operational objective to enhance international cooperation and collaboration in biosafety with outcomes to establish official relationships with the secretariats of other conventions and organizations and to have the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity as an observer to the Committees on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

* UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/1.

3. The COP-MOP further requested the Executive Secretary, subject to the availability of funds, to: (a) further pursue cooperation with other organizations, conventions and initiatives with a view to meeting the strategic objective in focal area 5 of the Strategic Plan, on outreach and cooperation; and (b) continue efforts to gain observer status in those committees of the World Trade Organization that are relevant to biosafety.

4. The present note provides an overview of the actions taken by the Executive Secretary within the context of the Strategic Plan and in response to the COP-MOP 6 decision BS-VI/6. The overview provides information on cooperative actions undertaken between the Secretariat and other organizations, conventions and initiatives with a view to creating synergy in biosafety-related programmes in general, and ensuring the effective implementation of the Protocol in particular.

5. Additional information on the collaborative activities with regard to specific areas of the Strategic Plan of the Protocol is reported, where relevant, in the respective pre-session documents issued for the seventh meeting of the Parties to the Protocol.

II. OVERVIEW OF ONGOING COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

A. *Green Customs Initiative*

6. In the context of operational objectives 2.3 and 5.2 of the Strategic Plan, the Secretariat continued as a partner in the Green Customs Initiative (GCI) during the intersessional period. The objective of GCI is to enhance the capacity of customs and other relevant enforcement personnel to monitor and facilitate the legal trade and to detect and prevent illegal trade in those environmentally sensitive goods or substances covered by the partner organizations.

7. The Secretariat's main GCI-related work during the intersessional period was the preparation of e-learning modules on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety which was included in the Partners' e-learning modules project funded through the United Nations Development Account. The e-learning modules are intended to be used in training customs officers and other practitioners. The Secretariat also contributed to the ninth meeting of the partners, which was held on 3 and 4 April 2013, at which the partners exchanged updates on activities from 2012 and discussed progress and plans for the coming years. Following the suggestion of the ninth meeting, the Division of Environmental Law and Conventions of the United Nations Environment Programme has recently taken the responsibility of hosting the GCI secretariat.

8. The Secretariat's continued participation in the Initiative, however, will depend on availability of resources since each partner organization needs to bring on board its own resources to be able to participate in joint activities, such as organizing training workshops, the development of training materials, and case studies, as well as attending partners meetings. The Parties to the Protocol may wish to consider allocating some resources in the budget for the upcoming biennium to sustain the work of this Initiative.

B. *Cooperation with the World Trade Organization*

9. The Secretariat continued to liaise and cooperate with WTO and to follow discussions and negotiations in committees within that organization, including by liaising with staff of the WTO secretariat. Briefings on pertinent decisions of the Conference of the Parties and the COP-MOP were provided to the Committee on Trade and Environment. The Secretariat holds observer status in the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment (CTE) in its regular sessions and is invited, on a regular basis, to the formal meetings of CTE special (negotiating) sessions.

C. Cooperation in information-sharing

10. At its sixth meeting, in paragraph 1(b) of decision BS-VI/2, the COP-MOP requested the Executive Secretary to continue its collaboration with other biosafety databases and platforms, the Secretariat contacted most of the international organizations currently maintaining databases on LMOs (i.e. OECD, FAO, GIC, CERA and GMO Compass)¹ with the aim of avoiding duplication of efforts and improving the usefulness of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) as a global mechanism for information-sharing on biosafety.

11. In facilitating the collaboration with the databases, two major actions were undertaken during the intersessional period: (a) full integration of the BCH into the revamped Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) of the Convention and development of a unified Application Programming Interface (API) for interoperability with third parties. The API is designed, among other things, to provide full access to BCH data, and in general all CBD-CHM data, to all institutions and organizations wishing to display this information on their websites; and (b) the introduction of a new feature in the LMO decisions pages which displays, when required, matching records from external databases. The first database made available was Biotradestatus, supported by the Global Industry Coalition (GIC) through CropLife International, for the regulatory and market status of agricultural biotechnology products. Similar arrangements are currently under way to include the OECD's BioTrack Product Database and the FAO GM Foods Platform.

12. Two databases on LMO detection methods, namely the European Union Reference Laboratory for GM Food and Feed (EU-RL GMFF) and the CropLife International Detection Methods Database, have also been made interoperable with the BCH. References to specific detection methods, when available, are provided as links on the LMO information pages.²

13. With regard to capacity-building, the Secretariat has worked closely with the UNEP/GEF Project for Building Capacity for Effective Participation in the BCH by providing technical assistance on the development of national nodes as well as training activities directed to regional advisors and BCH national focal points, involving regional and subregional workshops.

D. Cooperation on technical and scientific issues

14. During the intersessional period, the CBD Secretariat continued to cooperate with the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) by reporting on its relevant activities to the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures at its eighth and ninth sessions, and providing feedback on draft standards and draft specifications being developed under the auspices of the IPPC and on public awareness materials developed by the International Advisory Group on Pest Risk Analysis, which is coordinated by the Secretariat of IPPC. Furthermore, the IPPC Secretariat and the CBD Secretariat held a joint meeting in Montreal, Canada, on 16 and 17 September 2013 with the objective of identifying activities for collaboration in the light of the strategies adopted under IPPC, the CBD and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and recent meetings of their governing bodies.

¹ OECD's BioTrack Product Database is available at <http://www2.oecd.org/biotech/>; FAO's GM Foods Platform is available at <http://www.fao.org/food/food-safety-quality/gm-foods-platform/en/>; GIC's Biotradestatus database is available at <http://www.biotradestatus.com/>; CERA's GM Crop Database is available at <http://cera-gmc.org/GMCropDatabase>; and GMO Compass' database is available at <http://www.gmo-compass.org/eng/gmo/db/>.

² The European Union Reference Laboratory for GM Food and Feed (EU-RL GMFF) and the CropLife International Detection Methods databases are both reachable through links to BCH records of LMOs and are available respectively at <http://gmo-crl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/default.htm> (EURL-GMFF) and <http://www.detection-methods.com/> (CropLife). Full interoperability with the CropLife database is still to be achieved.

15. The Secretariat is also seeking opportunities to establish cooperation with other United Nations bodies and relevant organizations with a view to building capacity, transferring technology and exchanging information necessary to detect and identify LMOs.

16. As part of the efforts, discussions have been initiated between the CBD Secretariat and representatives of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) at the Institute for Health and Consumer Protection of the European Commission to identify possible areas of common interest. An agreement was reached to explore possibilities to establish collaboration for conducting capacity-building and training activities in the context of detection and identification of LMOs that could assist Parties in achieving the relevant outcomes of the Strategic Plan of the Protocol.

17. Furthermore, the CBD Secretariat and the Food Safety and Quality Unit of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations have identified areas of common interest with regard to the detection and identification of LMOs. Both secretariats have expressed the willingness to seek opportunities to combine efforts through a formal cooperation.

E. Cooperation with the Aarhus Convention on public awareness and participation

18. At its second meeting, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties requested the Executive Secretary, in decision BS-II/6, to intensify cooperation with the Aarhus Convention secretariat in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on matters of public awareness and participation. At their fifth meeting, in decision BS-V/13, Parties adopted the programme of work on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms. In the same decision, Parties underlined the importance of ensuring coherence among the programme of work and relevant activities of the Aarhus Convention and other relevant conventions and organizations to maximize opportunities for cooperation in the promotion of public awareness, education and participation concerning living modified organisms. Further, at its sixth meeting, in decision BS-VI/6, the COP-MOP requested the Executive Secretary to pursue cooperation with other organizations, conventions and initiatives with a view to meeting the strategic objective in focal area 5 of the Strategic Plan, on outreach and cooperation.

19. Pursuant to the above decisions, the Secretariat has collaborated with the Aarhus Convention secretariat through some joint activities. As a follow-up to the online forum organized in 2012, the two secretariats co-organized and facilitated another forum in 2014 through the Biosafety Clearing-House. The online forum on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs included two discussion groups, on: (a) the meaning, scope and importance of public access to biosafety information; and (b) facilitating public access to biosafety information. The online forum on public participation concerning LMOs included one online discussion on “techniques for engaging the public”.

The two secretariats co-organized a round table on access to information, public participation and access to justice regarding LMOs/GMOs which was held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 16 and 17 October 2013. The round table was aimed at building capacities among Parties in promoting access to information, participation and access to justice regarding LMOs/GMOs through sharing knowledge, good practices and lessons learned, and at making recommendations for future action at the national, regional and international levels. At the multilateral level, it was recommended that the two secretariats, as appropriate, continue assisting countries in ratifying and implementing the two instruments in the context of LMOs/GMOs, among other things, through: (a) mainstreaming the Aarhus Convention and Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety into biodiversity, environmental and sustainable development policies and programmes; (b) and supporting the organization of regional capacity-building events during the period 2014–2017, as appropriate; and (c) developing jointly a checklist of key measures required for

ratifying and implementing the two instruments, based on the Aarhus Convention's Lucca Guidelines and the Protocol's programme of work.³

20. Continued collaboration between the two secretariats, including the possibility of organizing joint workshops and/or side events will depend on availability of resources. The meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to invite Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations to consider allocating resources in the budget of the upcoming biennium to sustain the collaborative work.

III. ELEMENTS OF A DRAFT DECISION

24. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to take note of the information provided in the present report and consider:

(a) Whether there are aspects of cooperation with other organizations, conventions and initiatives which are not being adequately addressed to meet the strategic objective of the Strategic Plan regarding outreach and cooperation, and may wish to specify activities to address those aspects;

(b) The issue of lack of resources for collaborative work with other organizations, conventions and initiatives relevant to biosafety and decide on some remedial actions, such as including a budget for activities related to the Green Customs Initiative and the Aarhus Convention on public awareness and participation, among others, so that the Secretariat could effectively engage with these other organizations, conventions and initiatives and enhance its collaborative actions.

³ The report is available at: http://www.unepce.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/wgp/WGP_17/ece.mp.pp.wg.1.2014.6_aec.pdf