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INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

Fifth meeting
Montreal, 19-21 October 2009

SUMMARY OUTCOMES OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The fifth meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-IAC) was held in Montreal from 19 to 21 October 2009.
2. The meeting was attended by experts selected from: Belize, China, the European Community, Liberia, Madagascar, Peru, Serbia, Slovenia, Tajikistan and Uruguay.¹ Representatives of the following Governments and organizations also participated in the meeting as observers: United States Department of State, CBD Alliance, Global Industry Coalition (GIC) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).²
3. The meeting was convened by the Executive Secretary, in accordance with section E of the modalities of operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House (decision BS-I/3, annex) to seek guidance with respect to technical issues associated with the ongoing development of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH).
4. Mr. Johansen T. Voker from Liberia served as Chairperson of the meeting and Ms. Marydelene Vasquez from Belize served as Rapporteur.
5. The meeting adopted the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/5/1). The following principal items were discussed by the Committee:
 - (a) Current status of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
 - (b) Assessment of recent changes in the Biosafety Clearing-House;

¹ Experts were also invited from Belgium, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Switzerland and Tonga but were unable to attend.

² Observers were also invited from the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI) and the Third World Network (TWN) but were unable to attend.

- (c) Assessment of the Biosafety Clearing-House forum, activities and tools;
- (d) Assessment of national and regional nodes;
- (e) Pending requests from the decisions of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety:
 - (i) Introduction of online tools for statistical analysis and graphic representations of data;
 - (ii) Study of users and potential users of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
- (f) Status of the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Clearing-House project extension;
- (g) Draft Strategic Plan of the Cartagena Protocol focusing on the Biosafety Clearing-House component; and
- (h) Future developments and challenges.

6. The meeting heard presentations by Mr. Giovanni Ferraiolo, Programme Officer, Biosafety Clearing-House, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, on the current status of the Biosafety Clearing-House; Mr. Damien Plan, Joint Research Centre - Institute for Health and Consumer Protection, on the activities of the European Commission concerning the Protocol and the Biosafety Clearing-House; Dr. Enrique N. Fernandez-Northcote, Biosafety Coordinator, Peruvian Institute of Biotechnology, on the LAC-Biosafety Project; Mr. Charles Gbedemah, Senior Environmental Affairs Officer, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, on the draft Strategic Plan of the Cartagena Protocol focusing on the Biosafety Clearing-House component; Mr. Philippe LeBlond, Computer Information Systems Officer, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, on the introduction of online tools for statistical analysis and graphic representations of data; and Ms. Tea Garcia Huidobro, Programme Officer for Biosafety and Biodiversity, United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNEP/ROLAC), on the status of the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Clearing-House project extension.

II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

7. Having discussed the items outlined in the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/5/1), the Informal Advisory Committee agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations, attached hereto as annex I, to the Executive Secretary for consideration in the implementation of the programme of work for the Biosafety Clearing-House. Annex II to this report contains the list of participants to the meeting.

8. In the interest of using the available time for discussions, it was agreed that the Secretariat presents a draft of the meeting report by email to all members for their comments prior to its final publication.

9. Mr. Voker thanked all of the meeting participants for their kind inputs and closed the meeting at 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 21 October 2009.

Annex I

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INFORMAL ADVISORY
COMMITTEE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE AT ITS FIFTH MEETING**

The Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House

I. Recent changes in the Biosafety Clearing-House

1. *Commends* the Secretariat for the progress achieved and the quality of the improvements made, stressing that the Biosafety Clearing-House has, as a result, become a more logical and user-friendly tool;
2. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:
 - (a) Increase the number of options for grouping search results (e.g. geographical groups);
 - (b) Explore the use of various analytical tools to better understand the interests of Biosafety Clearing-House users in accessing Biosafety Clearing-House pages;
 - (c) Translate the new management centre and common formats into all the official United Nations languages;
 - (d) Highlight the distinction between official national records and reference records;
 - (e) Add a category for Biosafety Clearing-House training in the new capacity-building common format;
 - (f) Remind Parties to complete the mandatory fields where the information is missing or incomplete during the annual review of Biosafety Clearing-House records;
 - (g) Remind Parties to maintain the accuracy and completeness of their records and delete obsolete records; and
 - (h) Increase synergies with other international databases (e.g., Codex Alimentarius) as appropriate;

II. Biosafety Clearing-House forum, activities and tools

3. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:
 - (a) Explore ways to distinguish between Parties, non-Parties and Observers in the discussion groups as is done in the real-time conferences;
 - (b) Make the Biosafety Clearing-House forum, activities and tools more widely known and accessible to other stakeholders; and
 - (c) Train Biosafety Clearing-House regional advisors in the newly launched discussion groups and real-time conferences;

III. *Online tools for statistical analysis and graphic representations of data*

4. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:

(a) Implement tools to display geographical distribution of data in the Biosafety Clearing-House by countries or groups;

(b) Use a phased process to implement online tools for statistical analysis and graphic representations of data. Implementation should take place by making available a limited number of categories of metadata (e.g. the dates of record creation and update, type and results of decisions, LMO traits, etc.) and then the number of these categories should be expanded over time following an analysis of use;

(c) Provide quick-view information in country profiles of approved LMOs based on the number of parental organisms; and

(d) Ensure consistency in the use of icons throughout the Biosafety Clearing-House;

IV. *Study of users and potential users of the Biosafety Clearing-House*

5. *Recommends* that the Secretariat draft the terms of reference for the study according to the following:

(a) Use a questionnaire as part of the study;

(b) Target the questionnaire to appropriate stakeholders groups including: project coordinators, participants in previous Biosafety Clearing-House workshops, regional advisors, civil society organizations (CSOs), industry, customs officers, phytosanitary officers, national focal points, competent national authorities, media, scientists, university community (e.g. students, researchers and professors), parliamentarians and their researchers, seed associations, farmers associations, etc.;

(c) Consult the Biosafety Clearing-House regional advisors to identify specific participants from previous training workshops to be targeted for the questionnaire;

(d) Request assistance from the Biosafety Clearing-House regional advisors network to encourage participation in completing the questionnaire;

(e) Focus the study on assessing useful ways to analyse, present and package existing information on the Biosafety Clearing-House rather than on the substantive information contained therein or on new information that could be submitted;

(f) Use workshop reports as part of the study;

(g) Use the study to increase awareness of the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(h) Make available the questionnaire in all official United Nations languages;

(i) Design the questionnaire to address the issue of obstacles in the use of the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(j) Allow for the completion of the questionnaire online; and

(k) Include pop-up questions on the Biosafety Clearing-House regarding satisfaction with its functions;

V. *Draft Strategic Plan of the Cartagena Protocol focusing on the Biosafety Clearing-House component*

6. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:

- (a) Change the phrase “the potential adverse effects” to “any potential adverse effects” in the vision statement of the Strategic Plan;
- (b) Ensure that there is a specific item in the Strategic Plan that underscores the need for Parties to mainstream biosafety, and with it the operations of the Biosafety Clearing-House, into general environmental and sustainable development work plans; and
- (c) Collaborate with the United Nations Environment Programme to ensure that the UNEP-GEF BCH II project is in alignment with the draft Strategic Plan of the Cartagena Protocol and the GEF strategy for financing biosafety, especially with regard to outcomes and indicators;

VI. *Future developments and challenges*

7. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:

- (a) Use newly developed tools (e.g. discussion forums, real-time conferences, etc.) to train main categories of users of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
- (b) Provide outreach materials through the Biosafety Clearing-House for use by the media;
- (c) Streamline the process of translating the Biosafety Clearing-House to include post-translation review; and
- (d) Provide the DVD-ROM offline version of the Biosafety Clearing-House in all of the official United Nations languages;

VII. *Status of the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Clearing-House project extension*

Having heard the presentation by the representative of UNEP on the status of the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Clearing-House project extension,

8. *Welcomes* the approval of the extension of the project (phase II) and respectfully offers the following recommendations for the United Nations Environment Programme to:

- (a) Review and update the list of eligible countries provided in the project concept so as to include countries that have recently become Parties to the Protocol and recently completed their National Biosafety Frameworks (NBFs) and/or BCH Phase I Project;
- (b) Consider including, in sub-regional networking activities of the project, countries that are not participating in the current project as took place under the Biosafety Clearing-House phase I project;
- (c) Seek ways to extend Biosafety Clearing-House support, under GEF and/or other financing sources, to a wider group of countries that may be either ineligible under the current project, or eligible but unable to participate in the quota of 50 countries set for the current project;
- (d) Reiterate the value of national workshops for training both potentially new stakeholders as information retrievers (e.g. customs officers) and as information providers (e.g., National Authorized Users);

(e) Stress the relevance of subregional activities for exchange of experiences and networking amongst Biosafety Clearing-House national focal points and Protocol focal points, including non-participating countries, as occurred under the Biosafety Clearing-House phase I project;

(f) Collaborate with the Secretariat to re-train Biosafety Clearing-House regional advisors on the use of the revamped Biosafety Clearing-House as one of the first steps in the project;

(g) Request that the re-training of Biosafety Clearing-House regional advisors takes place through a global activity that will bring all Biosafety Clearing-House regional advisors together for updating; and

(h) Select new target groups for training and tailor the training accordingly.

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