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### INFORMAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

Eighth meeting

Online format, 17 April 2013

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

#### I. INTRODUCTION

1. In section 5 of the modalities of operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH), adopted in decision BS-I/3, the meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol (COP-MOP) stated that the Secretariat “may seek assistance from an informal advisory committee, constituted and coordinated by the Executive Secretary in a transparent manner, with a particular focus on providing guidance with respect to resolution of technical issues associated with the ongoing development of the Biosafety Clearing-House.”
2. At its seventh meeting, held in Montreal from 28 to 30 March 2012, the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH IAC) expressed its support for increasing the exchange of information through the use of an online facility, in accordance with the request by the COP-MOP in its decision BS-V/2, and volunteered to conduct one meeting using the online format to test its feasibility and success.
3. Accordingly, the eighth meeting of the BCH-IAC was conducted using the online format, through five online discussion groups held in the BCH-IAC Forum which finally culminated in a real-time online teleconference which was held through a webinar platform provided and managed by the UNEP-GEF BCH II Project.
4. The online events were attended by experts selected from: Belarus, Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, European Union, Fiji, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, India, Jamaica, Kenya and the Philippines. The National Focal Point for the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-NFP) of the United States of America and representatives from the following organizations also took part in the meeting as observers: Bayer Cropscience, EcoNexus, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). An invited expert from the Czech Republic and Canada's BCH-NFP were unable to participate.

#### II. ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUPS

5. The online discussions were held through the BCH-IAC Forum between 19 March and 16 April 2013. The discussions commenced with the posting of the following four questions regarding the BCH modalities of operation (decision BS-I/3, annex) and the relevant BCH operational objectives of the Strategic Plan.

- In your opinion, is the BCH currently guided by the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and equity, and open to all Governments?
- In your opinion, has the BCH built up its functions and activities in response to clear and identified demand, and based on available experience and resources?
- In your opinion, has the BCH improved upon the accuracy and quality of information submitted to and retrieved from the BCH?
- Do you have any general comments or suggestions regarding the current status of the BCH?

6. In subsequent discussions, participants were also invited to provide their feedback on the following aspects of the BCH: (a) BCH developments since the seventh meeting of the BCH-IAC; (b) pending recommendations of the BCH-IAC; (c) the improving number of mandatory information registered in the BCH by Parties as of January 2013; and (d) implementation of the COP-MOP 6 requests to the Executive Secretary on the operation and activities of the BCH.

7. A short survey was also conducted by the Secretariat among the participants to collect additional information on the assessment of the current version of the BCH. Participants were requested to assess various fundamental components of the BCH and make recommendations for further improvement.

## II. REAL-TIME ONLINE TELECONFERENCE

8. A real-time online teleconference was convened by the Executive Secretary on 17 April, between 12:00 and 15:00 UTC/GMT to further discuss the relevant issues and make recommendations.

9. The online meeting was opened by Mr. Charles Gbedemah, Principal Officer, Biosafety Protocol. In his statement Mr. Gbedemah emphasized the importance of the work of the BCH-IAC, highlighted the cost saving component of the process and expressed the support of the Secretariat for the new online format of the BCH-IAC. Mr. Giovanni Ferraiolo, Scientific and Technical Information Officer, Biosafety Protocol, facilitated the discussions throughout the remainder of the meeting.

10. The Committee adopted the provisional agenda (attached as annex I) and deliberated on the following items:

(a) *Developments in the BCH and ongoing projects.* Participants agreed that a highly positive consensus was reached in response to the opening questions of the discussion group; in particular the BCH-IAC agreed that:

- The BCH is currently guided by the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and equity, and open to all Governments;
- The BCH has built up its functions and activities in response to clear and identified demand, and based on available experience and resources; and
- There has been a clear improvement in the accuracy and quality of information submitted to and retrieved from the BCH.

(b) *Outcomes of the conclusions and recommendations of the sixth and seventh meeting of the BCH-IAC.* The participants were invited to provide further comments after taking into consideration the interventions posted in the online discussion group and made recommendations as reflected in annex II of this report.

(c) *Outcomes of the BCH-IAC Survey.* Results of the online survey on the BCH were presented to the participants. The following eight BCH components were assessed as 'Very Good' the

'Home' page, 'The BCH' section; 'The Protocol' section, the 'Finding Information' section, the 'Registering Information' section, the 'Resources' section, the 'Completeness of National Records' page and the Common Formats. The 'Help' section of the BCH was rated as 'Good'. Participants also provided further comments on the specific recommendations resulting from the survey.

(d) *Ongoing collaboration with the UNEP-GEF project for continued enhancement of building capacity for effective participation in the UNEP-GEF BCH II Project.* Progress reports of the project were presented by Ms. Ileana Lopez (Project Manager - BCH Project, UNEP-DELCO) and Mr. Ernesto Ocampo (BCH Specialist – BCH project). Participants also provided feedback on possible future development of capacity-building projects related to the BCH.

(e) *Requests to the Executive Secretary from the sixth meeting of the COP-MOP.* Participants made suggestions on the implementation of the requests to the Executive Secretary, on the operation and activities of the BCH, from the sixth meeting of the COP-MOP.

## **II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

11. At the end of the deliberations on the items outlined in the provisional agenda, the Informal Advisory Committee agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations, attached hereto as annex II, for the consideration of the Executive Secretary in the implementation of the programme of work for the BCH. Annex III to this report contains the list of participants to the meeting.

12. Mr. Ferraiolo thanked all of the participants for their kind inputs and closed the meeting at 15:20 UTC/GMT on Wednesday, 17 April 2013.

*Annex I*

**PROVISIONAL AGENDA**

Opening of the meeting.

Organizational matters:

- (i) Adoption of the agenda;
- (ii) Organization of work.

Substantive issues:

- (iii) Developments in the Biosafety Clearing-House and ongoing projects;
- (iv) Outcomes of the conclusions and recommendations of the sixth and seventh meetings of the Informal Advisory Committee on the Biosafety Clearing-House;
- (v) Outcomes of the BCH-IAC Survey;
- (vi) Ongoing collaboration with the UNEP-GEF project for continued enhancement of building capacity for effective participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-II); and
- (vii) Requests to the Executive Secretary from the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP).

Other matters.

Conclusions and recommendations.

Closure of the meeting.

*Annex II*

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

*The Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House*

1. *Commends* the Secretariat for having implemented the majority of its recommendations since the sixth and seventh meetings of the BCH-IAC;
2. *Further commends* the Secretariat for improving the user-friendliness of the BCH;
3. *Recognizes* that the content registered by BCH users needs further improvement;
4. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:
  - i) Takes action on the remaining recommendations from the sixth and seventh meetings of the BCH-IAC;
  - ii) Develops a better interactive, practical and simplified online training tool in the field of risk assessment;
  - iii) Continues to provide BCH training Webinars in languages other than English, in particular on the submission and retrieval of information in collaboration with the UNEP-GEF BCH Project;
  - iv) Provides additional information in the BCH's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) with regard to LMO registration to clarify when a new LMO needs to be registered in the BCH;
  - v) Indicates in the LMO dedicated table if the LMO is approved, prohibited or approved with conditions;
  - vi) Increases the visibility of the 'Help' section;
  - vii) Also increases the visibility, on the 'Finding Information' and 'Resources' web pages, of links to training and educational materials, especially those developed under the UNEP-GEF BCH I & II Projects;
  - viii) Continues to liaise with Parties to provide complete and accurate information through the BCH and with a special emphasis on decisions on LMOs that are registered in the Biotradestatus database but not in the BCH;
  - ix) Continues with the translation of BCH content into the 6 official UN languages;
  - x) Increases public awareness, education and participation efforts to expose *more* relevant stakeholders (e.g. civil society, industry, academia, etc.) to the benefits of retrieving and registering biosafety information in the BCH in order to assist them in their daily decision-making tasks by, among other things: (a) better promoting the use of the AJAX plugin which can provide free access to registries on LMOs, genes, organisms, etc.; (b) developing interactive educational tools for children and youth (elementary school, secondary school and university) on the Cartagena Protocol, the BCH and risk assessment; (c) continuing to launch online forums on biosafety targeting wide-ranging audiences; and (d) continuing to liaise with BCH-NFPs in order for them to provide complete and accurate information through the BCH; and
  - xi) Conducts a comprehensive quality assessment survey of all BCH stakeholders and continue to explore interoperability possibilities between the BCH and other databases (e.g. OECD and FAO) in accordance with the requests of COP-MOP 6.
5. *Takes note* that the Common Format for Biosafety Experts registered in the BCH's Roster of Experts is too detailed and *recommends* its significant simplification. The IAC further *recommends* that this be brought to the attention of the Parties at the seventh meeting of COP-MOP for review and action.

6. *Supports* the continuation of the UNEP-GEF BCH project (as requested by the Parties in decisions BS-IV/2 and BS-V/2) to all eligible countries (as requested by UNEP) in order to improve the quality and quantity of information registered in the BCH, following the extension and success of the project.
7. *Reiterates* the need for online forums to take place on all major computer operating systems, including Linux; and
8. *Recommends* that future intersessional meetings of the BCH-IAC be conducted in the online format except those which take place prior to the COP-MOP, as these should be held in the traditional 'face-to-face' format with online discussions preceding the meeting.

*Annex III*

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