



**CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY**

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/CBD/ICCP/2/9/Add.1
1 October 2001

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY**

Second meeting
Nairobi, 1-5 October 2001
Agenda item 4.8.2

INFORMATION-SHARING

*Progress report on the development and implementation of the pilot phase
of the Biosafety Clearing-House*

Addendum

**TECHNICAL REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT PHASE OF THE
BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE**

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. BACKGROUND

1. At its first meeting, held in Montpellier, France, 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 (BCH) established by Article 20 of the Protocol. The ICCP mandated the Bureau to provide management oversight of the development and implementation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House and to draw upon appropriate technical advisory expertise to facilitate this development and implementation.

2. At its first meeting, the ICCP requested the Executive Secretary to commission an independent and transparent review of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House utilizing feedback from participating countries and indicators to measure success against the objectives of the pilot phase. At its meeting held on 9-10 July 2001 in Havana, the Bureau considered this issue and decided that the independent review of the pilot phase will be conducted after the second meeting of the ICCP. It was the view of the Bureau that the ICCP did not call for such review to be conducted before its second meeting and that the process is at its early stage that does not warrant a separate review from the oversight of a group of technical experts. Instead, the Bureau requested the Secretariat to arrange for a meeting of the Liaison Group of Technical Experts on the Biosafety Clearing House in Nairobi at the time of the Open-

/...

ended Meeting of Experts on a Compliance Regime under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, to have a technical review of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House. To the extent possible, the composition of the Liaison Group was the same as the group that met on 19-20 March 2001 in Montreal to provide recommendations on technical issues associated with the development and implementation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

3. The second meeting of the Liaison Group of Technical Experts was held in Nairobi on 27-28 September 2001. The present note was prepared by the Executive Secretary to inform the Intergovernmental Committee about the outcomes of the technical advice provided at the meeting.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

4. The Liaison Group recognized that the recommendations set out by the first meeting of the ICPC on information-sharing, and the first note from the Bureau on the technical issues associated with the implementation of the Pilot Phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, have been successfully implemented as requested. In particular, the central portal and central databases have been established online; the ability for Governments to register information online has been implemented; interoperability with international organizations (such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)) has been successfully tested; a toolkit to assist countries has been made available; common formats for registering information have been developed; and regional meetings to identify capacity-building needs have been initiated.

5. The Liaison Group also re-emphasized that the primary audience for the pilot phase of the BCH is the Governments that will register and retrieve data from the system, and noted that all participants should be encouraged to contribute information to the pilot phase and to actively participate in its development and use.

A. Development of the central portal and the central database

Central portal

- Use an interactive site map with explanatory text as an introductory page to better assist in the use and navigation of the Biosafety Clearing-House.
- Reorganize information categories to consolidate, wherever possible.
- Reconsider the format of the disclaimer on the entry of the central portal to make it shorter.

Management centre

- Recommend that countries establish a national focal point for the Biosafety Clearing-House, which will be responsible for validating data registered on the Biosafety Clearing-House for that country. Other authorized users will be able to register data on the Biosafety Clearing-House. However, to ensure authenticity of the information, the focal point for the Biosafety Clearing-House will be required to verify the accuracy of the record before it is made public. A copy of each record will also be sent to the ICPC/Biosafety Protocol national focal point for information.

- Facilitate registration of information by the use of automatic defaults whenever possible, and by linking fields with existing information.
- The registration of national focal points should be the responsibility of the Secretariat; however, contact details should be available for editing by authorized users of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

Central database

- Encourage the use of hyperlinks to existing information, to avoid duplication of work, such as applicant contact details.
- Where possible, make use of existing initiatives such as the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI), for example to link taxonomic data with common names of organisms. Special emphasis was also put on linking inserted genes with traits.

Related links

- Allow organizations undertaking biosafety-related activities to register relevant websites on the Biosafety Clearing-House, including brief descriptions and metadata (to be validated by the Secretariat before being made public).
- Review and examine the possibility of including other categories of information in the related websites category of the Biosafety Clearing-House, e.g. creation of a biosafety journal bibliography.

B. Linkage of central portal to national, regional and international databases/nodes

- Continue to encourage international, regional and subregional organizations, and national databases, to become interoperable with the Biosafety Clearing-House.

C. Common formats for registering information on the Biosafety Clearing-House

- Revise the common formats for registering information to enhance user-friendliness.
- Draft common format for registering summaries of risk assessments.
- Recognize the need for common formats to accommodate different categories of LMOs, such as plants, micro-organisms, animals, etc.

D. Development of the Biosafety Clearing-House tool-kit

- Further adapt the tool-kit with a search engine and elucidate the intended audience of each module in the tool-kit.
- Link specific sections of the Biosafety Clearing-House to the appropriate section in the tool-kit to better assist users and incorporate interactive components whenever possible.

E. Cooperation with other international organizations

- Make the guidelines for interoperability with the Biosafety Clearing-House better known to other international, regional, subregional organizations.

- Advise participants that they must ensure that mandatory information housed at other organizations is backed-up appropriately.

F. Alternatives to a Web-based information-sharing system

- Efforts to develop capacities should aim for full and equitable access to the Internet by all regions of the world. Where possible, make use of existing initiatives aimed at addressing the digital divide.
- Develop and disseminate CD-ROM versions of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, for training purposes.

G. Access to the roster of experts

- Pending the outcomes of the second meeting of the ICCP, incorporate the biosafety roster of experts in the Biosafety Clearing-House.

H. Identify and address the capacity needs of countries

- Assist Parties in the development of national databases by making the interoperability guidelines better known, and by developing and making available guidelines for the creation of a national Biosafety Clearing-House. This could include web page templates for the creation of national web sites, interoperable databases to register national information, etc.
- Where possible, encourage incorporation of training workshops on the Biosafety Clearing-House with other relevant biosafety-related meetings, and make regional training workshops an ongoing activity (subject to the necessary financial resources being made available).
- Redesign the “biosafety capacity-building projects” database along the lines of the action plan for capacity-building (to be considered by the second meeting of the ICCP), and include it in the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House to allow organizations to register information online.

I. Languages

- Develop and implement controlled vocabularies and keywords, based on multilingual international thesauri, wherever possible, to facilitate searching and retrieval of information in the official United Nations languages.
- Encourage countries to provide links to information that is available in the official United Nations languages.

J. Monitoring and review

- The future independent review should assess the effectiveness of the pilot phase, as perceived by the different users of the Biosafety Clearing-House, on the basis of the criteria identified in the first note by the Bureau on technical issues associated with the implementation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House.
