



Convention on Biological Diversity

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

Fifth meeting

Nagoya, 11-15 October 2010

INFORMATION-SHARING (ARTICLE 20)

Reports of the meetings of the Informal Advisory Committee for the Biosafety Clearing-House

1. In accordance with decision BS-I/3, the Secretariat periodically seeks assistance from an Informal Advisory Committee (BCH-IAC) with a focus on providing guidance to the resolution of technical issues associated with the development of the Biosafety Clearing-House.
2. The Executive Secretary is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the summaries of outcomes of the two past meetings held in Montreal, on 17-18 November 2008 and 19-21 October 2009.

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

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The fourth meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-IAC) was held in Montreal on 17-18 November 2008.

2. The meeting was attended by experts selected from: Belize, China, Indonesia, Liberia, Madagascar, Peru, Serbia, Slovenia, Tajikistan and Uruguay.¹ Representatives of the following organizations also participated in the meeting as observers: the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Project on the Biosafety Clearing-House, the Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI) and the Global Industry Coalition (GIC).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 Dr. Inez Hortense Slamet from Indonesia served as Rapporteur.

5. The meeting adopted the provisional agenda provided in document UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/4/1. The following principal items were discussed by the Committee:

- (a) Introduction and overview;
- (b) Review of the new Management Centre, new registration pages and common formats for off-line registration;
- (c) Review of the new “Help” section in the Biosafety Clearing-House;
- (d) Progress in the online forums on risk assessment, capacity-building and Article 18;
- (e) General progress in the multi-year programme of work;
- (f) Pending requests from the decisions of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety;
- (g) Training activities and collaboration with the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Clearing-House project; and
- (h) Future developments and challenges.

6. The meeting benefitted from presentations made by Mrs. Jyoti Mathur Filipp, Prof. Ernesto Ocampo and Ms. Marydelene Vasquez on capacity-building activities being undertaken by the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Clearing-House project. Prof. Ocampo also made a presentation on the new “Help” section, which was developed by the same project.

II. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

7. Having discussed the items outlined in the provisional agenda (UNEP/CBD/BS/BCH-IAC/4/1), 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.

¹ Experts were also invited from the European Community, Japan, Sudan 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) and the Third World Network (TWN) but were unable to attend.

Annex I to the report of the fourth meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House

I. GENERAL

1. *Welcomes* the new common formats developed by the Convention Secretariat, as contained in annex II to the report of its fourth meeting;
2. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:
 - (a) Link the national reports to the country profiles;
 - (b) Analyse other Biosafety Clearing-House datasets in the same manner used for the national reports;
 - (c) Provide guidance on which Biosafety Clearing-House records should be registered in advance before submitting a new record;
 - (d) Produce release notes for all new changes in the Biosafety Clearing-House (important for documentation, help section, translation, training, etc.) and send alerts to appropriate users (e.g. regional advisors);
 - (e) Establish a discussion forum for the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
 - (f) Release version 4 of the BCH Interoperability Services, including documentation and training material, and implement the phase-out policy established at the second meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House; and
 - (g) Explore means to develop outreach material for the use of the media and to make it available through the Biosafety Clearing-House.

II. NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS

3. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:
 - (a) As part of the annual provision of information to the BCH exercise, verify the status of all national focal points for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and for the Biosafety Clearing-House (as well as Competent National Authorities) confirming the individual names, complete contact details and responsible institutions;
 - (b) Bring to the attention of the Bureau the repeated cases of some Parties not providing information to the Secretariat regarding the status of their national focal points;
 - (c) In a good-practices recommendation, clearly define the terms of reference of each national focal point;

III. COMMON FORMATS FOR REGISTERING INFORMATION IN THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

4. *Endorses*, upon a comprehensive review during its meeting, all of the new common formats for registering information in the Biosafety Clearing-House as contained in annex II to the present report;

5. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:

(a) Bring to the attention of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol absence of minimum information criteria for risk-assessment summaries submitted to the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(b) Assess the performance of the roster of experts as it develops and consider the possibility of an online forum on this subject;

(c) Evaluate a better name for “Reference material” in the Biosafety Information Resource Centre (BIRC);

(d) Allow searches to be performed on variants of the name of living modified organisms, for instance by entering “MON810”, “MON 810” or “MON-810” in the search term, the record on MON810 would be retrieved;

(e) Maintain “Recipient organism” in the LMO Registry without mentioning “Parental organism”, but keep it flagged for future needs when instances such as fusion of cells beyond the taxonomic family may not be accurately covered;

(f) Maintain the “Phenotypic changes” field as a text entry field in the LMO Registry but keep it flagged for future needs to allow input regarding other types of modifications such as change in chromosome number (e.g. resulting from fusion of cells beyond the taxonomic family);

(g) Evaluate possible uses of the Health Canada database for information on pathogenicity and allergenicity in the Organism Registry;

(h) Liaise with germplasm and gene banks for obtaining metadata for the Organism Registry;

IV. “HELP” SECTION IN THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

6. *Welcomes* the new “Help” section in the Biosafety Clearing-House;

7. *Recommends* that the Secretariat: highlight the “Training materials” link in the Biosafety Clearing-House and collect feedback on the use of this section;

V. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION BS-IV/2 (OPERATION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE)

Paragraphs 1-3: Lack of submission of information to the Biosafety Clearing-House (Advance Informed Agreement (AIA), living modified organisms intended for direct use as food or feed or for further processing (LMOs- FFPs), BIRC)

8. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:

(a) Write to national focal points to gain insight into what the problem is submitting information called for in paragraphs 1-3 of decision BS-IV/2;

(b) Provide more training to specific stakeholders in order to help increase government submissions and establish a long-term strategy for awareness;

(c) Increase dissemination of training material on AIA and FFP submissions;

(d) Remind Parties of their obligations under the Protocol and decisions of the Parties;

(e) Take a regional and/or more specific approach in promoting better participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(f) Use data-mining tools to produce BCH reports (including possible comparisons with national reports);

Paragraph 4: Organization of search results

9. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:
- (a) Offer the option to group (i.e. summarize) results of searches by different categories and drill down summaries to obtain detailed data
 - (b) Offer the option to add more columns in search outputs;
 - (c) Offer the option to sort results by different categories (and with a wider range of categories);

Paragraph 4 (c): Statistical tools

10. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:
- (a) Introduce geographic information system (GIS) data;
 - (b) Implement data-mining tools (e.g., OLAP);

Paragraph 6: Validation of records (timeframe)

11. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:
- (a) Distinguish which Biosafety Clearing-House records have expiration dates and what the time-period prior to expiry should be;
 - (b) Establish an automatic alert system and send expired records to the attention of the national focal point for the Biosafety-Clearing-House;
 - (c) Identify data sets where the expiration date may be decided by the national focal point for the Biosafety-Clearing-House;

Paragraph 7: BCH Hermes and Ajax plug-in

12. *Welcomes* the new interoperability tools;
13. *Recommends* that the Secretariat:
- (a) Promote the use of Hermes and Ajax plug-in;
 - (b) Also promote alternative uses for the Ajax plug-in in other biosafety websites (i.e. not only for BCH national nodes);

VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ONLINE FORUM AS FOR DECISIONS BS-IV/11 (RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT)

14. *Recommends* that the Secretariat enhance the role of the moderator for stimulating better participation in the online forum; and

VII. MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMME OF WORK (COP-MOP DECISION BS-II/2)

15. *Recommends* that the Secretariat draft further advances of the multi-year programme of work.

SUMMARY OF THE 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.³ 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).⁴

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;
- (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

³ Experts were also invited from Belgium, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Switzerland and Tonga but were unable to attend.

⁴ 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.

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.

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 to the report of the fifth meeting of the Informal Advisory Committee of the Biosafety Clearing-House

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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.
