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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

Sixth meeting

Hyderabad, India, 1-5 October 2012

Item 5 of the provisional agenda<sup>\*</sup>

### **OPERATION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE**

*Note by the Executive Secretary*

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) is established by Article 20 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety as part of the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), in order to (a) facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, living modified organisms; and (b) assist Parties to implement the Protocol. The Central Portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) is accessible online at <http://bch.cbd.int>.

2. At its fifth meeting, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (COP-MOP), in decision BS-V/2, reminded Parties of their obligations and invited other Governments to: (a) provide to the Biosafety Clearing-House, in a timely manner, complete and accurate information on final decisions pertaining to living modified organisms and the risk assessment summaries regarding such decisions; (b) Cooperate fully with the Secretariat in its efforts to maintain complete information in the Biosafety Clearing-House; (c) Indicate and document specific obstacles preventing or hindering the effective use of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

3. The Parties in their decision BS-V/2 also requested the Executive Secretary to: (a) Continue providing assistance and information to Parties on how to submit and retrieve information from the central portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House and to explore innovative ways for assisting Parties in making information in the Biosafety Clearing-House available also in languages other than the official United Nations languages; (b) facilitate, through the Biosafety Clearing-House, online forums and conferences on topics relevant to biosafety and the implementation of the Protocol; (c) increase the involvement of Biosafety Clearing-House National Focal Points by promoting, among other things, regular exchange of information and online discussions and to explore innovative ways for gathering views from Parties where internet connectivity is limited; and (d) explore ways to develop a mechanism for harmonizing similar data from various other sources (e.g. the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) with the view to avoiding duplication of efforts and improving the utility of the Biosafety Clearing-House as a global mechanism for information-sharing on biosafety.

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<sup>\*</sup> UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/6/1.

4. Furthermore, in the same decision, the Parties to the Protocol requested Parties and invited other Governments and relevant organizations to: (a) submit to the Executive Secretary views on the changes made during the last inter-sessional period to the (i) Common Formats; (ii) registration procedure; (iii) tools for the analysis of search results; and (iv) graphical representations of data, and requested the Executive Secretary to take these views into account for future improvements of the Biosafety Clearing-House; and (b) participate actively in online forums and conferences on topics relevant to biosafety and the implementation of the Protocol with the view to reaching an adequate level of regional participation and ensuring that the results of the discussion may be taken into account. The Parties to the Protocol further requested Parties and invited other Governments to identify their needs regarding national Biosafety Clearing-House nodes in a detailed manner through the Biosafety Clearing-House, and requested the United Nations Environment Programme, through the BCH II Project, and the Executive Secretary to provide the necessary support for the needs identified.

5. The Parties to the Protocol also requested UNEP, through the BCH II Project, to: (a) Promote capacity-building activities at the global, regional and, in particular, sub-regional levels in order to increase exchange of experiences among different countries; (b) Produce in collaboration with the Executive Secretary, further guidance on the Biosafety Clearing-House and to categories of potential users that have been identified as being least aware of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

6. At their fifth meeting, the Parties to the Protocol, in decision BS-V/5, on ‘Financial mechanism and resources’, recommended to the Conference of the Parties, in adopting its guidance to the Global Environment Facility with respect to support for the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and with reference to the UNEP-GEF BCH II project, to urge the GEF, among other things, to “expand its support for capacity-building for effective participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House to all eligible Parties to the Protocol and to submit a report for consideration by the sixth meeting of the Parties to the Protocol”.

7. In decision BS-V/16, the Parties to the Protocol, adopted the Strategic Plan of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety<sup>1</sup> covering the period 2011 to 2020. Section II of the present document presents a progress report on information sharing according to the relevant objectives under the Strategic Plan of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Section III provides a preliminary assessment of the BCH based on information from the second national reports using the indicators of the Strategic Plan of the Protocol. Section IV presents elements for a decision on the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House. The annex to the document contains a breakdown of records submitted to the Biosafety Clearing-House, histogram charts produced from the information in the second national Reports, and an assessment using the indicators of the of the Strategic Plan specific to the BCH.

## **II. PROGRESS ON INFORMATION SHARING ACCORDING TO THE RELEVANT STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY (FOCAL AREA 4 AND ELEMENTS OF FOCAL AREA 2)**

8. Information sharing is identified in the Strategic Plan of the Protocol as a strategic objective (focal area 4) which aims at enhancing “the availability and exchange of relevant information” on the Protocol. Information sharing is further identified as one of the operational objectives under Capacity-Building (focal area 2) of the Strategic Plan. The following section presents a progress report on implementation to date under these broad and targeted objectives of the Strategic Plan.

### ***A. Focal Area 2: Capacity-Building (operational objective 2.6)***

9. Focal area 2 of the Strategic Plan focuses on ‘Capacity-building’ with a strategic objective to “further develop and strengthen the capacity of Parties to implement the Protocol”. One of the expected

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<sup>1</sup> BS-V/16 annex at [http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/issues/cpb\\_stplan\\_txt.shtml](http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/issues/cpb_stplan_txt.shtml)

impacts of Focal area 2 after the 10-year duration of the Strategic Plan is the “full use of information exchange systems” and the operational objective 2.6, on Information sharing, is designed “to ensure that the BCH is easily accessed by all established stakeholders, in particular in developing countries and countries with economies in transition”.

10. During the intersessional period, the Secretariat has directed its activities to realizing the above objectives within the Strategic Plan by providing: (i) further training on the use of the BCH and (ii) improving the ease of access to the BCH’s Central Portal:

*Training*

(a) At the inception of the second phase of the UNEP-GEF BCH II project, the Secretariat provided training to 32 Regional Advisors, the core group of trainers under the project, and has provided continuous online support for their work;

(b) In collaboration with the UNEP-GEF BCH-II project, the staff of the Secretariat participated in the organization and delivery of three subregional training workshops attended by BCH National Focal Points from 45 countries.<sup>2</sup> A fourth workshop for the Caribbean subregion is scheduled for the month of July 2012;

(c) In order to facilitate the work of the UNEP-GEF BCH II project, the Secretariat developed a new training tool, through the BCH, which allows Regional Advisors to have access to and manage training instances of the Hermes application for the development of national BCH nodes;

(d) An entirely new online training BCH space was developed by the Secretariat through which, for training purposes only,<sup>3</sup> any registered user can practice submitting records as (i) a General Registered User, (ii) a BCH National Focal Point (BCH-NFP) or (iii) a National Authorized User (NAU);

(e) A new ‘Help’ section on ‘Registering information’ and new training materials, including new stakeholder curricula, case-studies and guidance on Hermes and Ajax development tools, have been developed by the UNEP-GEF BCH II project, peer reviewed by the Secretariat and made available through the BCH Help section;<sup>4</sup>

(f) Information on new and improved tools, which have been made available through the BCH, have been disseminated to BCH-NFPs and NAUs through workshops and BCH forums (see Forum section below);

(g) Notwithstanding the COP-MOP request (COP decision X/25) “to expand its support for capacity-building for effective participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House to all eligible Parties to the Protocol”, activities of the second phase of the BCH Capacity-Building project have been limited, to date, to 50 Parties out of the 147 eligible Parties under the focal area ‘biodiversity’.

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<sup>2</sup> • The following regional training workshops were held under the UNEP-GEF BCH II project: Latin American (5-9 September 2011, Panama City, Panama), Asia-Pacific and CEE Regional Training Workshop ( 24-28 October 2011, Daejeon, Republic of Korea) and Africa Regional Training Workshop (14-18 November 2011, Tunis, Tunisia).

<sup>3</sup> The BCH training site is available at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/trainingsite.shtml>

<sup>4</sup> The ‘Registering information’ help section and the new training materials are available from the BCH Help section at <http://bch.cbd.int/help/topics/en/webframe.html>

*Ease of access*

(a) During the intersessional period, the Secretariat completed the translation of all the BCH pages in the six official languages of the United Nations and on on-going basis, continues to update all new pages and amend existing ones;

(b) The BCH currently allow users to submit records in at least one of the six official languages of the United Nations as well as an unlimited number of other languages. For all records that are made available in more than one language, a selection menu at the top of the record page allows users to choose among the different language options. The multi-language option is also available when BCH records are displayed by using the Hermes or Ajax solutions for national participation;

(c) In particular, the Hermes application is a complete multi-language platform that allows countries to translate the entire infrastructure of their biosafety national nodes (e.g. menu, user interface etc.) and create them in the language of their choice. Examples of official Hermes websites in different languages are available at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/solutions/>;

(d) BCH users may also register metadata and accompanying documents in languages other than the six official United Nations languages. However, with regards to metadata, a courtesy translation in one of the six official United Nations languages is required while courtesy translations of documents attached to records are highly encouraged;

(e) A new BCH module for the management of National Authorized Users (NAUs) was made available through the BCH to all BCH National Focal Points (BCH-NFPs). The module allows BCH-NFPs to appoint NAUs to submit National Records prior to their validation and to manage national BCH nodes based on Hermes instances;

(f) Special efforts were made to improve the workflow for the management of BCH records with special emphasis on fostering collaboration between NAUs and BCH-NFPs. Currently, all records requiring the attention of BCH-NFPs or NAUs (i.e. records submitted/rejected/accepted or request for changes) are highlighted on the main page of the 'Registering Information' section of the BCH. Furthermore, personalized email messages are sent to the relevant BCH users in order to streamline the management of BCH records;

(g) A similar system of e-mail message alerts has been developed to inform users of any change in their BCH status (e.g. subscription to forums, appointment as an expert to the Roster of Biosafety Experts, etc.);

(h) New icons have been introduced in all lists of records generated by BCH queries. They inform users of the main categories to which each specific record belongs. The functions of the icons are explained by texts that appear when the mouse pointer hovers over the icon ('tooltip'). A BCH page also provides a legend for all of the icons that appear in the BCH;<sup>5</sup>

(i) A survey was conducted among BCH-NFPs and NAUs in countries with limited internet connectivity to assess whether a BCH Central Portal specifically designed for facilitating its access through hand-held devices could increase general accessibility to the BCH. The results of the survey were inconclusive. On one hand, connection to the internet through mobile phone lines was acknowledged as a possible alternative to limited computer connectivity. On the other hand, cost concerns suggested that it would be unlikely that the institutions affiliated with participants in the survey could support its use.

***B. Focal Area 4: Information sharing (operational objectives 4.1-3)***

11. Focal area 4 of the strategic plan focuses on 'Information Sharing' and its strategic objective is "to enhance the availability and exchange of relevant information". This focal area also foresees three

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<sup>5</sup> The page providing legends for all the icons that appear in the BCH is available under the 'Resource' section of the BCH at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/icons/>.

operational objectives: (i) BCH effectiveness; (ii) BCH as a tool for online discussions and conferences; and (iii) Information sharing other than through the BCH.

12. Operational objective 4.1, *BCH effectiveness*, aims “to increase the amount and quality of information submitted to and retrieved from the BCH”. In this area, during the intersessional period, the Secretariat focused its activities on: (i) improving some of the common formats for the submission of information, (ii) increasing the ease of both submitting and retrieving information, (iii) widening the range of sources of information available and (iv) general maintenance of the Central Portal.

*Changes to common formats*

(a) A new common format was introduced for the submission of the ‘Second National Report on the Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol’. The online common format is linked to a new ‘Analyzer’ tool<sup>6</sup> that allows BCH users to select sections/questions of interest, cross-compare results by region/country, visualize statistics, etc.

(b) The common format for the submission of information to the ‘Biosafety Information Resource Centre (BIRC)’ has been updated to allow users to link records on risk assessment to specific sections of the “Guidance on Risk Assessment of Living Modified Organisms” (decision BS-V/12). A special mechanism for the validation of these records has been implemented and is submitted to the Parties to the Protocol for its consideration under the agenda item 14 on Risk Assessment;

(c) The common format for ‘Biosafety Organizations’ has been updated to allow the submission of information regarding laboratories for detection and identification of LMOs (decision BS-V/9);

(d) The common format for ‘Living Modified Organisms’ has been updated to host graphic information on the construct of genetic elements (the editing of this function is currently limited to the Secretariat).

*Ease of submission*

(a) In its ongoing efforts to improve the accuracy and completeness of the records registered in the BCH, the Secretariat has made available a new web page in the BCH Central Portal titled ‘Completeness of National Records’,<sup>7</sup> This page allows BCH-NFPs and NAUs to identify incomplete published national records and accordingly update them with the mandatory information as required by the common formats;

(b) Following a recommendation from the Informal Advisory Committee (BCH-IAC),<sup>8</sup> greater flexibility will be granted regarding the submission of additional mandatory information in incomplete records. In particular, and limited to incomplete records created prior to the introduction of mandatory fields, it will be possible to partially amend and re-publish these records without necessarily submitting all of the missing mandatory information;

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<sup>6</sup> Utility for the search of National reports information as well the related analyzers are available under the ‘Finding Information’ section of the BCH at <http://bch.cbd.int/database/reports/>

<sup>7</sup> The page on ‘Completeness of National Records’ is available under the ‘Retrieving Information’ section of the BCH at <http://bch.cbd.int/managementcentre/record-completeness/>

<sup>8</sup> 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 BCH. The summary outcomes of the two meetings held during the intersessional period are available in document UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/6/INF/20.



*Ease of retrieval*

(a) Several changes were made to search interfaces and output formats with the aim to facilitate the retrieval of information: e.g. introduction of new filters on the search pages, categorization of output results through the use of icons (still to be completed), distinction on the Home Page between new and recently updated records, crosslinks between amending and amended records, etc;

(b) The Biosafety Information Resource Centre (BIRC) search interface now provides for the search of keywords contained in the text of the attached documents (e.g. PDF or MS Word format files);

(c) ‘LMO Quicklinks’ (small image files which identify an LMO through its unique identifier, trade name and a link to the BCH page where information on the LMO is available) are now provided in each LMO record registered in the BCH<sup>9</sup> (see Fig. 1);

(d) An ‘Advanced Search’ module has been introduced in order to allow users to search throughout all categories of records.<sup>10</sup> The list of search parameters made available in the advanced search will be gradually increased in the future (see Fig. 2);

Figure 1 – ‘LMO Quicklink’ available from the LMO information page



Figure 2 – Advanced Search



(e) In addition to grouping and sorting options already available on the search result pages, the records produced by any search may now be also displayed in multiple ways: i.e. lists (categorized by icons), geographical maps (when results can be organized by countries) and a matrix whereby BCH users may select horizontal and vertical axes among the most relevant parameters and then produce graphic representations of the distribution of data (histograms, see Fig. 3-6);

(f) Data obtained through any search on the BCH may be exported in ‘csv’ format files, readable using any spread sheet software (e.g. MS Excel).

<sup>9</sup> Information about ‘LMO Quicklinks’ and links for their downloads are available under the ‘Resource’ section of the BCH at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/quicklinks.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> The ‘Advanced search’ page is available under the ‘Finding Information’ section of the BCH at <http://bch.cbd.int/database/advanced/>

Figure 3 – List of risk assessment records submitted to the BCH



Figure 4 – Geographical distribution (GIS map) of risk assessment records submitted to the BCH



Figure 5 – Regional distribution (matrix) of risk assessment records submitted to the BCH

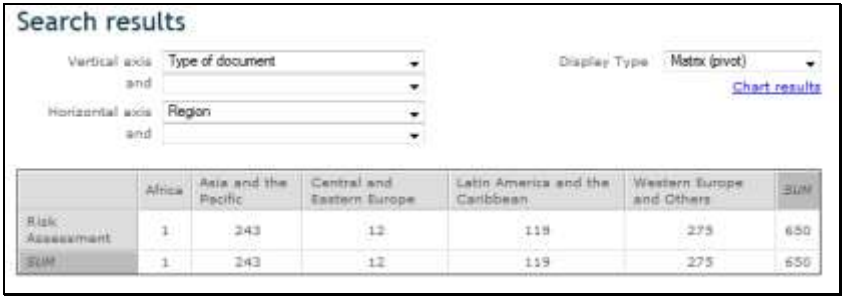
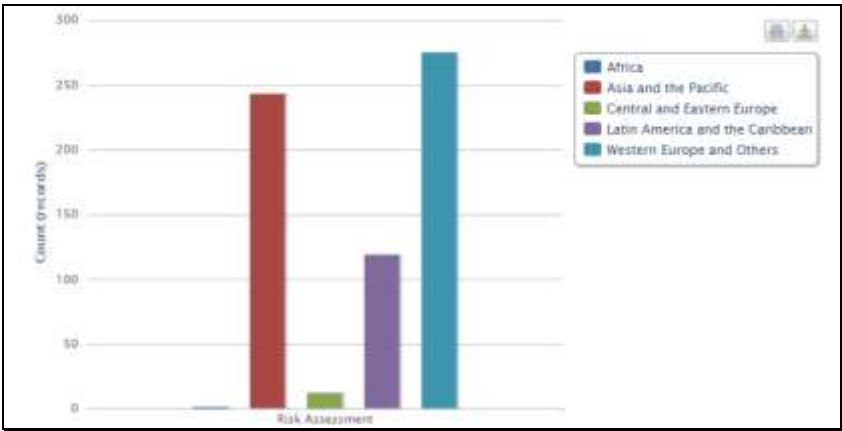


Figure 6 – Regional distribution (histogram chart) of risk assessment records submitted to the BCH



*Increased number of information sources available*

(a) Many available sources of information on biosafety have been aggregated under the overall title of 'BCH Virtual Library'. In addition to the existing 'Biosafety Information Resource Centre' (BIRC – maintained by the Secretariat) and the 'Bi(blio)safety' collections (maintained by the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, ICGEB), links to the 'Research4Life' initiative databases (maintained by both the Yale and Cornell University Libraries) and information on how to access them have now been included in the BCH Virtual Library;<sup>11</sup>

(b) Two databases on LMO detection methods, namely the 'EU Reference Laboratory for GM Food and Feed' (EURL-GMFF) and the 'CropLife International Detection Methods Database',<sup>12</sup> have been made interoperable with the BCH. References to specific detection methods, when available, are provided as links on the LMO information pages;

(c) Some progress has been made toward the implementation of interoperability with the 'Biotradestatus' database (managed by the Biotechnology Industry Organization - BIO)<sup>13</sup> for the regulatory and market status of certain agricultural biotechnology products.

*General maintenance of the Central Portal*

(a) Substantial improvements to the efficiency of the BCH have been made during the intersessional period. These include: (i) completion of the migration of all old records to the current common formats; (ii) migration or deletion of obsolete modules; (iii) upgrading of Hermes instances and removal of those that were not being used; and (iv) generally improved performance of the BCH website (i.e. faster page loading);

(b) Operational objective 4.2, *BCH as a tool for online discussions and conferences*, aims "to establish the BCH as a fully functional and effective platform for assisting countries in the implementation of the Protocol". During the intersessional period, the activity of the Secretariat in this area focussed on: (i) organization of online forums and real-time conferences and (ii) assistance to national nodes through the increased availability and capabilities of Hermes nodes as well as of information retrievable through the BCH Ajax plug-in.

*Online forums and real-time conferences*

(a) Twenty-seven online discussion groups, on eight different thematic areas of the Protocol, and eight real-time conferences, on two of these thematic areas, were launched and coordinated by the Secretariat during the intersessional period.<sup>14</sup> The discussion groups and real-time conferences were attended by a total of 1243 participants from all global regions. Some of the discussion groups and real-time conferences were conducted in official United Nations languages other than English. A breakdown of the participation in the discussion groups and real-time conferences is provided in Tables 1 and 2.

<sup>11</sup> Access to the BCH Virtual Library, including information on its collections (BIRC, Bi-blio-safety and Research4life) is available under the 'Finding Information' section of the BCH at <http://bch.cbd.int/database/library.shtml>

<sup>12</sup> The EU Reference Laboratory for GM Food and Feed (EURL-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.

<sup>13</sup> The Biotradestatus website, a database for the regulatory and market status of certain agricultural biotechnology products, is maintained by the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO) at <http://www.biotradestatus.com/>

<sup>14</sup> Data as of May 2012



(b) A diagnostic module<sup>15</sup> has also been developed with the aim to assist BCH users in connecting to the real-time conferences. The module has increased significantly the percentage of users capable of participating in the conferences and markedly reduced technical problems;

(c) In addition to the above forums, in order to allow for interaction among users on specific thematic areas, 12 collaborative portals are currently active through the BCH.<sup>16</sup>

*Table 1. – Details of the online forums held in the intersessional period*

Thematic area	Target	No. of discussion groups	Parties		Non-Parties		Organizations		Total	
			countries	participants	countries	participants	institutions	participants	countries/institutions	participants
Risk Assessment	RA Experts	8	50	193	6	12	56	76	112	281
BCH on BCH	NFPs, NAUs and CNA	1	163	624	30	57	0	0	193	681
BCH - IAC	BCH-IAC members	1	15	15	2	2	3	3	20	20
Capacity Building	Open	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Customs Officials	Customs Officials	1	15	21	-	-	-	-	15	21
Detection & Identification	Lab scientists	4	18	34	-	-	-	-	18	34
Socio-economic considerations	Open	9	34	74	5	18	-	-	39	92
UNEP-GEF BCH-II Project	Project related	1	23	29	5	8	N/A	N/A	28	37
<b>Total</b>		<b>27</b>		<b>990</b>		<b>97</b>		<b>79</b>		<b>1166</b>

*Table 2. – Details of the real-time conferences held in the intersessional period*

Thematic area	Target	No. of real-time conferences	Parties		Non-Parties		Organizations		Total	
			countries	participants	countries	participants	institutions	participants	countries/institutions	participants
Risk Assessment	RA Experts	4	18	29	-	-	11	11	29	40
Socio-economic considerations	Open	4	16	24	1	2	11	11	28	37
<b>Total</b>		<b>8</b>		<b>53</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>22</b>		<b>77</b>

### *Hermes and the BCH Ajax plug-in*

(a) A survey conducted in 2011 among BCH-NFPs allowed the Secretariat to identify and delete all unused Hermes instances and provide to interested countries an improved version of the tool. Hermes nodes allow NFPs to manage their own independent national biosafety websites by using the network capability, the Content Management System and all of the databases of the BCH's Central Portal. According to the information available in the BCH, as of the date this report was prepared, 21 countries have adopted this tool as the platform for their official national biosafety nodes.<sup>17</sup> In addition, 89 additional countries or regional organizations have requested Hermes instances and are currently testing them with the aim to develop their own national or regional biosafety websites;

<sup>15</sup> A 'Real-time Online conference diagnostic tool' is available, under the 'Resource' section of the BCH, at [http://bch.cbd.int/resources/realtime\\_diagnostic.shtml](http://bch.cbd.int/resources/realtime_diagnostic.shtml)

<sup>16</sup> A list of the 'Online forums and portals' is available, under the 'Resource' section of the BCH at <http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/>

<sup>17</sup> Information about Hermes and the BCH Ajax plug-in, together with a list of all Hermes sites indicated as official national biosafety nodes of the BCH, is available, under the 'Resource' section of the BCH at <http://bch.cbd.int/resources/solutions/>.

(b) An updated version of the BCH Ajax plug-in has been recently released by the Secretariat with the aim to allow independent websites to extract and display any information contained in all of the BCH's databases. In addition to national information, the new Ajax plug-in also allows websites to display BCH-derived information on LMOs, Genetic elements, Roster of Experts, BIRC records etc;

(c) Operational objective 4.3, *Information sharing other than through the BCH*, aims "to enhance understanding through other information exchange mechanisms". During the intersessional period, in this area, the Secretariat focussed its activities on: (i) active participation in regional and international meetings (see section on 'Training' above) and (ii) dissemination of BCH-related information through systems other than the BCH.

#### *Dissemination of BCH-related information*

(a) Offline copies of the BCH on DVD are shipped quarterly to 31 BCH-NFPs from countries that have limited Internet connectivity. As of June 2010, the content of the offline copies has been made available in all six official United Nations languages;

(b) All BCH users may subscribe to the "BCH Current Awareness Service", an email-based weekly bulletin that provides a list of the latest information submitted to the BCH. The bulletin also reports on the BCH news posted by BCH users and the Secretariat;

(c) The BCH news, Cartagena Protocol news and biosafety related notifications are also disseminated through the 'Really Simple Syndication' (RSS), a standardized format for web feeds, as well as through internet-based social networking services (e.g. Twitter and Facebook<sup>18</sup>). Access to all the BCH-related internet channels is provided on both the main page of the BCH Central Portal and the Cartagena Protocol website;

(d) A BCH *YouTube* channel has also been established.<sup>19</sup> From both the BCH Central Portal and the *YouTube* portal it is possible to download all videos produced by the Secretariat on biosafety. The list of outreach materials currently available on the BCH *YouTube* channel includes a video on the main provisions of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (in English and currently under translation in the other 5 official United Nations languages); a video on the Nagoya - Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress (in English); an introductory video to 'The Green Customs Initiative' (in all 6 official UN languages); five tutorials on the general use of the BCH (in English, French and Spanish); and an introductory video on the use of LMO Quick-links (in English);

(e) Following a COP-MOP request, in decision BS-V/2, contacts with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have been established with the aim to avoid duplication of efforts and improve the usefulness of the BCH as a global mechanism for information-sharing on biosafety. Both organizations have stated their intention to fully cooperate in achieving this goal. However, some technical challenges have delayed a detailed common action plan.

### **III. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE BCH BASED ON INFORMATION FROM THE SECOND NATIONAL REPORTS USING THE INDICATORS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN OF THE PROTOCOL**

13. On the basis of the information extracted from the BCH and the Second National Reports, as well as a preliminary assessment of the BCH using indicators of the Strategic Plan (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/6/INF/22), some progress has been made on the use of the BCH. In particular, from March 2010 (the date of the breakdown summary of BCH records proposed to COP-MOP 5):

<sup>18</sup> The Cartagena Protocol is present on 'Twitter' at <http://twitter.com/#!/BCHCPB> and on 'Facebook' (together with the CBD) at <http://www.facebook.com/UNBiodiversity>.

<sup>19</sup> A "YouTube channel" dedicated to the Cartagena Protocol is available at <http://www.youtube.com/user/bchcpb>.

(a) The total number of records submitted by countries to the BCH has increased by 24%, the total number of LMOs for which there is information available on the BCH has increased by 18% and the total number of biosafety publications available from the 'Biosafety Information Resource Centre' (BIRC) has increased by 31% (see annex, Table 1);

(b) The total number of decisions under Articles 10 and 11 submitted to the BCH has increased by 28% and those submitted by Parties have increased by 37% (see annex, Table 2);

(c) The total number of risk assessment summaries submitted to the BCH has increased by 106% and those submitted by Parties have increased by 121% (see annex, Table 2);

(d) The percentage of decisions on Articles 10 and 11 that are supported by an accompanying risk assessment summary has increased from 45% to 73% and the percentage of those submitted by Parties has increased from 54% to 88% (see Annex, Table 2);

(e) The total amount of traffic generated by the BCH in 2010 increased in 2011 by 16% in terms of the number of visits and by 4% in terms of the number of unique visitors to the site. Similar percentages were obtained for traffic originating from developing countries only (see annex, Table 3).

14. The above data clearly show positive trends regarding the commitment of countries, in particular countries that are Parties, in providing more accurate data through the BCH and complying with COP-MOP requests for transparency and completeness.

15. However, to date, 245 risk assessment summaries (corresponding to 27% of the decisions under Articles 10 and 11 registered in the BCH), of which 83 are from Parties (corresponding to 22% of the decisions under Articles 10 and 11 registered by Parties in the BCH), are yet to be submitted.

16. Furthermore, a unrefined comparison of the BCH data with that from the 'Biotradestatus' database,<sup>20</sup> maintained by the Biotechnology Industry Organization (BIO), also shows positive results in terms of the completeness of records registered in the BCH. The gap between the number of events commercialized worldwide by the main biotechnology companies (Bayer CropScience, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont Pioneer, Monsanto and Syngenta) and the number of decisions submitted to the BCH is, in fact, becoming narrower every year. As of May 2012, the total number of decisions under Article 10 and 11 submitted to the BCH was 93% of the total number of events registered in the Biotradestatus database.

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<sup>20</sup> At <http://www.biotradestatus.com>

#### IV. ELEMENTS OF A DRAFT DECISION ON THE MODALITIES OF OPERATION OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

17. At their sixth meeting, the Parties to the Protocol are invited to consider the general operation of the BCH and the ongoing implementation of its programme of work so as to further give direction to future BCH activities.

18. On the basis of the progress report on the implementation of the objective of the Strategic Plan, the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety may wish to:

- (a) *Welcome* the improvements made to the central portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House.
- (b) *Request* the Executive Secretary to:
  - (i) Collect feedback from Parties, other Government and relevant organizations on their experience with access to the BCH as well as submission and retrieval of data and to take this experience into account for future improvements of the Biosafety Clearing-House;
  - (ii) Continue its collaboration with other biosafety databases/platforms (e.g. the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) with the view to avoiding duplication of efforts and improving the utility of the Biosafety Clearing-House as a global mechanism for information-sharing on biosafety.
- (c) *Urge* Parties, and *invites* other Governments, in order to fulfilling their obligations under the Protocol and the decisions of the COP-MOP, to:
  - (i) Update all their incomplete published national records with the mandatory information as required by the common formats;
  - (ii) Submit to the Biosafety Clearing-House, in a timely manner, complete and accurate information on final decisions pertaining to living modified organisms as well as risk assessment summaries for all instances when requested by the Protocol including, *inter alia*, intentional introductions of living modified organisms into the environment for field trials regardless on whether or not the living modified organism will be subjected to future transboundary movements or commercialization;
  - (iii) Cooperate with the Secretariat in its efforts to maintain complete information in the Biosafety Clearing-House.
- (d) *Recommend* to the Conference of the Parties, in adopting its guidance to the Global Environment Facility with respect to support for the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, to urge the GEF, as the financial mechanism of the Convention, to further address the need for capacity building for the use of the BCH by extending the on-going project for continued enhancement of building capacity for effective participation in the BCH (BCH-II), currently limited to 50 participants, to all eligible Parties.

*Annex*

**BREAKDOWN OF RECORDS SUBMITTED TO THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE AND  
PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF BCH-RELEVANT INDICATORS OF THE STRATEGIC  
PLAN**

*Table 1. Number of records submitted to the Biosafety Clearing-House (as of May 31, 2012)*

Category of information	Number of BCH records <sup>21</sup>		Increase (%)
	March 2010	May 2012	
Protocol focal points	188	182	-3.2%
BCH focal points	191	192	0.5%
Article 17 focal points	80	83	3.8%
Competent National Authorities	351	363	3.4%
National biosafety websites and databases	106	124	17%
<b>Total records for national contacts</b>	<b>799</b>	<b>826</b>	<b>3.4%</b>
National laws	578	720	24.6%
Bilateral, multilateral and regional agreements	38	23	-39.5%
<b>Total records for laws &amp; regulations</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>22.7%</b>
Decisions under AIA (introduction into the environment)	309	476	54%
Decisions under Article 11.1 (LMO-FFPs)	576	659	14.4%
Other decisions and declarations	144	292	102.8%
<b>Total records for Country's decisions and other communications</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>972</b>	<b>24.9%</b>
<b>Total records for risk assessments reports</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>56.5%</b>
Roster of experts members	75	129	72%
Reports on expert assignments	0	1	100%
<b>Total records for the roster of experts</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>73.3%</b>
<b>Total records submitted by countries</b>	<b>2,685</b>	<b>3,336</b>	<b>24.2%</b>
LMO registry	337	399	18.4%
Genetic elements registry	234	323	38%
Organism registry	142	174	22.5%
<b>Total records for Registries</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>896</b>	<b>25.7%</b>
Capacity Building Activities, Projects and Opportunities	322	372	15.5%
Capacity needs and priorities	60	30	-50%
<b>Total records for capacity-building activities</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>5.2%</b>
<b>Total records for international organizations</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>24.3%</b>
<b>Total records for scientific bibliographic database</b>	<b>7,783</b>	<b>7,866</b>	<b>1.1%</b>
<b>Total records for Biosafety Information Resource Centre (BIRC)</b>	<b>1,043</b>	<b>1,368</b>	<b>31.2%</b>
<b>Total number of records in the BCH</b>	<b>12,816</b>	<b>14,129</b>	<b>10.2%</b>

<sup>21</sup> The difference between the sum of the records listed in each category and the total number of records is due to the possibility that one record contains information for more than one category (e.g. a focal point may have more than one role); in this case the same record is listed two or three times in the breakdown.



Table 2. Number of Country's Decisions and other Communications submitted to the BCH and details on decisions submitted under Articles 10 -11 and Risk assessments (as of May 31, 2012).

Countries	Total number of decisions / communications submitted to the BCH	Decisions under Articles 10 and 11				Risk assessments submitted
		Art. 10 only	Art. 11 only	Art. 10 and 11	Total	
<i>Parties</i>						
Austria	6	0	0	0	0	1
Barbados	1	0	0	0	0	0
Belgium	4	3	1	0	4	4
Brazil	31	0	0	31	31	31
Bulgaria	2	0	0	0	0	0
China	23	0	20	2	22	0
Colombia	81	38	40	0	78	70
Costa Rica	36	12	0	0	12	34
Cyprus	1	0	0	0	0	0
Denmark	1	0	0	0	0	0
Dominican Rep.	1	0	0	0	0	0
European Union	48	4	41	2	47	47
Germany	32	31	1	0	32	31
Honduras	1	1	0	0	1	1
India	5	5	0	0	5	5
Indonesia	1	1	0	0	1	1
Japan	97	5	35	56	96	96
Kenya	1	0	0	0	0	1
Libya	1	0	1	0	1	0
Malaysia	7	1	6	0	7	7
Mexico	47	12	35	0	47	5
Netherlands	2	0	2	0	2	2
New Zealand	25	0	23	0	23	0
Niger	1	0	0	0	0	0
Nigeria	1	1	0	0	1	0
Norway	2	1	0	0	1	0
Philippines	50	0	46	0	46	50
Republic of Korea	87	0	87	0	87	87
Romania	2	2	0	0	2	1
Saint Lucia	1	0	0	0	0	0
South Africa	13	3	0	0	3	0
Spain	112	111	1	0	112	112
Sweden	9	0	0	0	0	0
Switzerland	8	0	8	0	8	0
Syrian Arab Rep.	1	0	0	0	0	0
Viet Nam	3	3	0	0	3	3
<i>Sub-total (Parties)</i>	<i>744</i>	<i>234 (35%)</i>	<i>347 (52%)</i>	<i>91 (13%)</i>	<i>672 (100%)</i>	<i>589 (88%)</i>
<i>Non Parties</i>						
Argentina	21	9	10	2	21	10
Australia	29	1	24	4	29	0
Canada	64	2	14	48	64	61
USA	119	0	30	89	119	0
<i>Sub-total (Non-Parties)</i>	<i>233</i>	<i>12 (5%)</i>	<i>78 (33%)</i>	<i>143 (61%)</i>	<i>233 (100%)</i>	<i>71 (30%)</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>977</b>	<b>246 (27%)</b>	<b>425 (47%)</b>	<b>234 (26%)</b>	<b>905 (100%)</b>	<b>660 (73%)</b>
<b>Comparison of data as of March 2010 (from UNEP/CBD/ BS/COP-MOP/5/3, Annex, Table 2)</b>						
<i>Sub-total (Parties)</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>129 (26%)</i>	<i>321 (66%)</i>	<i>39 (8%)</i>	<i>489 (100%)</i>	<i>266 (54%)</i>
<i>Sub-total (Non-Parties)</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>1 (0%)</i>	<i>75 (35%)</i>	<i>140 (65%)</i>	<i>216 (100%)</i>	<i>54 (25%)</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>778</i>	<i>130 (18%)</i>	<i>396 (56%)</i>	<i>179 (25%)</i>	<i>705 (100%)</i>	<i>320 (45%)</i>

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Fig. 1: overview of the status of the information provided by Parties to the BCH (answers to questions 124 a-q of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Report).

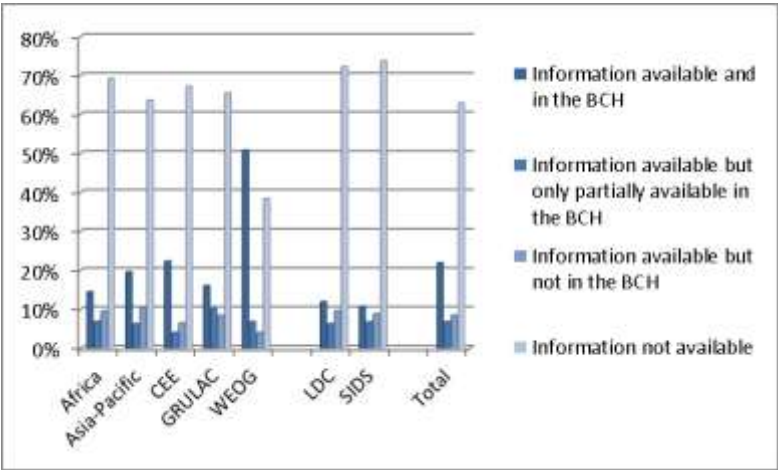


Fig. 2: Parties having established mechanisms for strengthening the capacity of the BCH-NFP and/or coordination among NFPs and CNAs for making information available to the BCH (answers to questions 125 & 126 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Report).

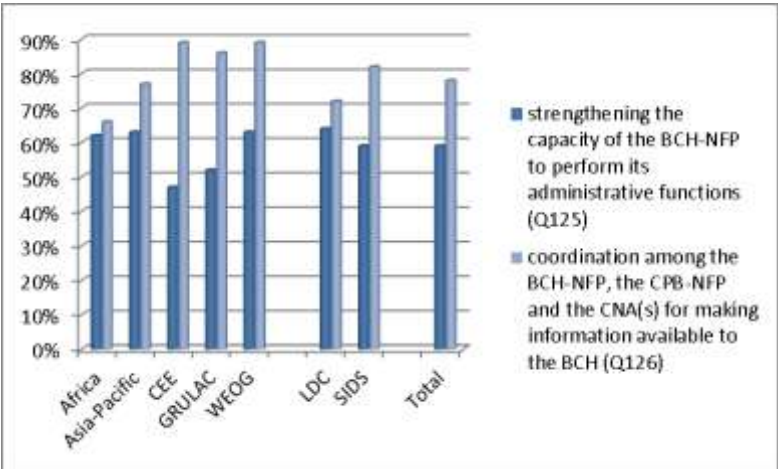
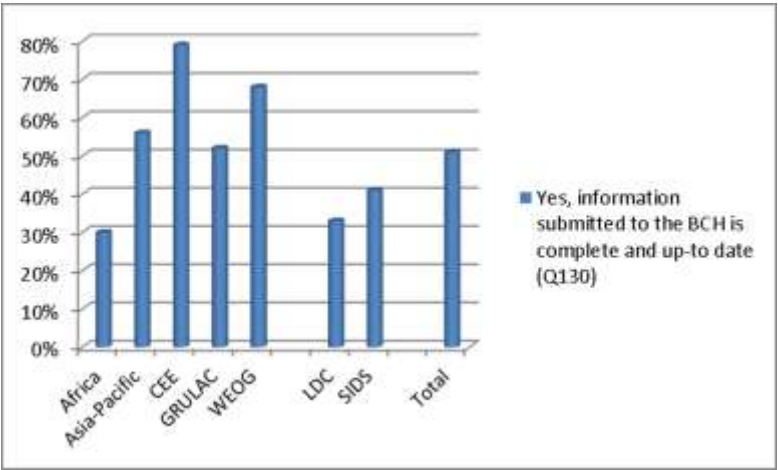


Fig. 3: Completeness and up-to-date of the information submitted (answers to question 130 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Report).



*Table 3. Assessment of relevant BCH indicators of the Strategic plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety for the period 2011-2020 (as of April 30, 2012)<sup>22</sup>.*

<b>Focal area 2: Capacity-building, Operational Objectives 2.6: Information sharing</b>		
2.6.1. Number of submissions to the BCH from developing countries and countries with economies in transition	1,406 / 3,621 = 38.8% (BCH records)	Source BCH: percentage of BCH records, submitted by developing countries <sup>23</sup> in relation to the total number of records submitted by countries.
2.6.2. Amount of traffic from users to the BCH from developing countries and countries with economies in transition	<i>Year 2010:</i> 50,624 / 126,202 = 40% (Visits) 32,786 / 83,810 = 39% (Unique Visitors)  <i>Year 2011:</i> 80,184 / 146,493 = 55% (Visits) 47,042 / 87,456 = 54% (Unique Visitors)	Source Google Analytics: percentage of visits and unique visitors per year from developing countries in relation to the total number of visits and unique visitors.
<b>Focal area 4: Information sharing, Operational Objectives 4.1: BCH effectiveness</b>		
4.1.1. Ratio of risk assessment summary reports as against number of decisions on LMOs	536/647 = 83% (BCH records)	Source BCH: number of records submitted by Parties under "Country's Decision or any other Communication" with "Subject" including "Decision on LMOs for intentional introduction into the environment (according Article 10 or domestic regulatory framework)" and/or "Decision on LMOs for direct use as food or feed, or for processing (Article 11, LMOs-FFPs)" with at least one LMO and a risk assessment summary attached.
4.1.2. Number of publications contained in the Biosafety Information Resource Centre	1,223 (BCH records)	Source BCH: number of records available in the BCH-BIRC
4.1.3. Amount of traffic from users to the BCH	<i>Year 2010:</i> 126,202 (Visits) 83,081 (Unique Visitors):  <i>Year 2011:</i> 146,493 (Visit) 87,456 (Unique Visitors)	Source: Google Analytics; total visits and unique visitors per year
4.1.4. Number of references to the BCH	289,176 (Links to the BCH): 3,372 (Pages linked to the BCH) 75,100 (Google references to the BCH)	Sources: Google and Google Webmaster Tools; links count (net of cbd.int, chm-cbd.net and biodiv.org)
4.1.5. Number of countries with focal points registered on the BCH	176 (CPB-NFP) 192 (BCH-NFP) 72 (Art17-CP)	Source BCH

<sup>22</sup> Data extracted from the second national report (2nd NR) refer to submissions from 143 Parties as of 31 December 2011 when there were 161 Parties to the Protocol; data from other sources current as of April 2012 unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of the assessment of indicators of the Strategic plan in this table, data about developing countries are obtained by subtraction, from the overall sums, of data from WEOG and Japan.

4.1.6. Number of countries/regions having published biosafety laws and or regulations on the BCH	155 (Countries)	Source BCH
4.1.7. Number of AIA/domestic decisions available through BCH	903 (BCH records)	Source BCH: number of records submitted by Parties under “Country’s Decision or any other Communication” with “Subject” including “Decision on LMOs for intentional introduction into the environment (according Article 10 or domestic regulatory framework)” and/or “Decision on LMOs for direct use as food or feed, or for processing (Article 11, LMOs-FFPs)”
4.1.8. Number of users of the BCH requesting improvement on accuracy, completeness or timeliness of information	N/A	Data not available
<b>Focal area 4: Information sharing, Operational Objectives 4.2: BCH as a tool for online discussions and conferences</b>		
4.2.1. Percentage of Parties participating in online discussions and real-time conferences on the BCH	45/163 = 28% (Parties) Risk Assessment: 50 (31%) Detection: 18 (11%) Custom Officers: 15 (9%) Socioeconomic: 34 (21%) BCH on BCH: 163(100%) BCH-IAC: 15 (9%) UNEP-GEF BCH II: 23 (14%)	Source BCH: average and breakdown of participating parties to BCH forums and real-time conferences (2010-2012)
4.2.2. Number of participants in online discussions and conferences, their diversity and background	1,166 (Participants) Risk Assessment: 281 Detection: 34 Custom Officers: 21 Socioeconomic: 92 BCH on BCH: 681 BCH-IAC: 20 BCH-UNEP-GEF-II: 37	Source BCH: total number and breakdown of participants to BCH forums and real-time conferences (2010-2012)
4.2.3. Number of capacity-building activities aimed to increase the transparency, inclusiveness and equity of participation in the BCH	6 thematic areas (Risk assessment, BCH, Detection, Custom officers, Capacity-building, Socioeconomic issues) 34 discussion groups 9 real-time conferences (2 rounds)	Source BCH: Number of BCH forums and real-time conferences (2010-2012)
<b>Focal area 4: Information sharing, Operational Objectives 4.3: Information sharing other than through the BCH</b>		
4.3.1. Number of events organized in relation to biosafety	114 seminars, and 167 workshops	Source BCH
4.3.2. Number of biosafety related publications shared	1,223 (BCH records)	Source BCH: number of records available in the BCH-BIRC

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