

## Solomon Islands holds first national BCH workshop

By Loretta Brigidia Manele (Island Sun Newspaper)

The first national Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) Capacity Building workshop took place at Kairos Conference room yesterday.



*Participants of the Solomon Islands first BCH national workshop (Photo: ECD)*

Officially opening the program was Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology's (MECDM) Director of Environment and Conservation Division, Mr Joe Horokou who emphasized the importance of protecting our biodiversity against threats posed by Living Modified Organisms (LMOs).

Initially, he stated that Solomon Islands ratified the Convention of Biodiversity (CBD) on October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1995.

“In addition to the umbrella agreement, the CBD elaborates its obligations relating to biosafety in the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The Biosafety Protocol was adopted by the CBD COP in 2000 and entered into force on 11 September 2004”

“Solomon Islands ratified and signed the Cartagena Protocol to the Biosafety in July 2004”, said Mr Horokou.

He said that a major reason for the country in signing the Protocol was the recognition of the importance of protecting our biodiversity against threats posed from Living Modified Organisms (LMOs) taking into consideration that biodiversity is the basis of our people's livelihoods.

“There are emerging and existing issues that our country faced with genetically modified organism or living modified organism and it should be a concern to all of us for our livelihood and well-being”, he said.

Mr Horokou explained that as a starting point the country has developed a Biosafety Framework which is committed to the Cartagena Protocol and more importantly to the need of having a proper mechanism in place at the national level for coordination and dealing with modified organisms (LMO) issues.

In relation, he voiced that it sets a direction through policy, legal, administrative and technical instruments to ensure an adequate level of protection in the field of safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology.



The Director mentioned that this was developed with the consideration of the potential adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and the risks to health of Solomon Islanders.

He said that there are many grey areas that relevant stakeholders need to identify and collaborate to address if we are to move forward in finding better ways to combat issues of GMOs and LMOs in the country.

Mr Horokou stated that this workshop is a huge opportunity for Solomon Islands to improve it’s capacity in areas of information sharing, access and collation.

He appealed to partner ministries and relevant stakeholders at the workshop to make the most of the workshop and learn as much as possible about the protocol and its related issues of GMOs and LMOs.

The workshop was facilitated by Pacific region’s expert in Biosafety from Tonga, Mr Samiuela Fonua.

This BCH workshop is an UN Environment project funded by Global Environment Facility.

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