ROYAL NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF
CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity
413 St. Jacques street Suite 800, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H2Y 1N9

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Submission from Norway - on the "Elements of a Framework for Conceptual Clarity on Socio-Economic Considerations" contained in the annex to the report of the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on socio-economic considerations

With reference to notifications 2015/007 and 2015/029 Norway finds that the proposed elements of a framework for conceptual clarity on socio-economic considerations (as presented in the Annex to the Report of the Ad Hoc Technincal Expert Group on Socioeconomic Considerations) represents a balanced platform for further elaborations.

There are many different views among Parties on how to operationalize the issue of socio-economic considerations. As Norway is a member of the AHTEG, we are fully aware of the fact that this framework is the result of a compromise. At this stage, it is important that this work continues and Parties are able to make further progress through joint efforts.

Norway would also like to take this opportunity to share some information on the legal basis for considering the socio-economic dimension for LMOs in Norway:

The Norwegian Gene Technology Act (http://www.regjeringen.no/en/doc/laws/Acts/gene-technology-act.html?id=173031)
regulates the production and use of LMOs and entered into force in 1993. The Gene technology Act's criteria provisions regarding sustainability, benefit to society and ethics is in the spirit of the Brundtland Commission's report "Our common future". Overall, the possible environmental or health risks imposed by LMOs should be outweighed by the benefits for society if an LMO is to be approved.

Postal address	Office address	Telephone*	Department for Nature Management	Our officer
PO Box 8013 Dep	Kongens gate 20	+47 22 24 90 90		Casper Linnestad
NO-0030 Oslo		Vat no.		+47 45895
postmottak@kld.dep.no	http://www.kld.dep.no/	972 417 882		

The Norwegian Biotechnology Advisory Board (http://www.bion.no/english/) is an independent body consisting of 15 members appointed by the Norwegian government. The main tasks of the Norwegian Biotechnology Advisory Board is to evaluate the social and ethical consequences of modern biotechnology and to discuss usage which promotes sustainable development. The Advisory Board is specifically mentioned in the Gene Technology Act.

The provisions on the socioeconomic criteria is found in the preamble of the Act, in Article 10 of the Act and in Appendix four of the Regulations relating to impact assessment pursuant to the Gene Technology Act. This Appendix (see http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/md/documents-and-publications/acts-and-regulations/regulations/2005/regulations-relating-to-impact-assessmen.html?id=440455) contains inter alia check-lists with socio-economic (and ethics/sustainability related) questions that that could be asked when assessing a given LMO.

Furhter background material is to be found in the following:
http://www.bion.no/filarkiv/2010/07/2009_11_18_diskusjonsnotat_baerekraft_engelsk.pdf
http://www.dirnat.no/content/582/Societal-Utility-and-Sustainable-Development

The socio-economic questions are meant to reveal favourable or unfavourable social consequences:

A. Checklist
1. Characteristics of the product
Is it reasonable to say that there is a demand or a need for the product?
Is it reasonable to say that the product will solve or help to solve a social problem?
Is it reasonable to say that the product is significantly better than similar products that are already on the market?
Is it reasonable to say that there are alternatives that are more suitable than this product for solving or helping to solve the social problem in question?

2. Production and use of the product
Will the product have a positive effect on industrial development and wealth creation, including new employment opportunities?
Will the product have a positive effect on industrial development and wealth creation, including new employment opportunities, in rural areas in particular?
Will the product have a positive effect on industrial development and wealth creation, including new employment opportunities, in other countries?
Will the product tend to create problems for existing production that should be maintained?
Will the product tend to create problems for existing production in other countries?

B. Comment
An evaluation of whether a product is of benefit to society must be based on a discussion of the answers to all these questions. However, not all the questions will be relevant in all cases.

Recently, the Norwegian Environment Agency in cooperation with the Norwegian Biotechnology Advisory Board have been considering how to develop more trait-specific guidelines for assessment of sustainability and benefit to society. An expert group was established consisting of scientists from relevant fields of science, natural sciences, social sciences and economics. A relevant report from 2014 can be found here: http://www.bioteknologiradet.no/filarkiv/2014/09/Herbicide-resistant_genetically_modified_plants_and_sustainability_NBAB.pdf

Sincerely,

Solveig Paulsen
Ass. Deputy Director General

Casper Linnestad
Senior Adviser

This document is electronically approved and sent without signature