

Minutes of the teleconference of the AHTEG Bureau, 24 July 2009

Participants:

Helmut Gaugitsch	(Chair of the AHTEG)
Vilasini Pillai	(Rapporteur of the AHTEG)
Beatrix Tappeser	(Chair of the SWG on Stacked Genes)
Eliana Fontes	(Chair of the SWG on LM Mosquitoes)
Hans Bergmans	(Chair of the SWG on the Roadmap)
Kazuo Watanabe	(Chair of the SWG on Abiotic Stress)

In attendance:

Chales Gbedemah	(CDB Secretariat)
Giovanni Ferraiolo	(CDB Secretariat)
Manoela Miranda	(CDB Secretariat)

Agenda:

1. Current status of development of the guidance document;
2. Summary of the most important issues of the online discussions within the SWG and under the Open-ended Online Expert Forum and how these points fit into the process of developing the documents;
3. Difficulties and challenges faced (e.g. how different views are being dealt with, lack of information, etc);
4. Way forward, including activities and timeframe, in order to finalize the draft guidance documents prior to the second meeting of the AHTEG in April 2010 (tentative).

Summary:

1. The teleconference started at 11:00 GMT. The AHTEG Chair introduced the provisional agenda and asked if there were any changes. The agenda was adopted without amendments.
2. Under agenda item 1, the Chairs of the Sub-working Groups (SWGs) provided short summaries of the progress of the work under the four SWGs. It was noted that initial drafts/outlines of the guidance documents prepared by the SWGs served as basis for the recent online discussions under the Open-ended Online Expert Forum. The Bureau agreed that good progress has been made in the drafting of all the guidance documents but noted that, in some cases, participation of experts was less than optimal. All four SWG Chairs informed the Bureau that there would be a re-drafting of the guidance documents based on the interventions made during the online discussions under the Open-ended Forums for another round of deliberations and input by the members of the SWGs.

3. Under agenda item 2, the SWG Chairs highlighted a number of emerging issues that have been discussed in the online discussions. Among these, the scope of the guidance documents was raised in all SWGs.

4. The Chair of the SWG on the Roadmap explained that, during the online discussions, the scope of the roadmap was discussed, particularly with regard to its focus on commercial releases and/or field trials. In this regard, the AHTEG Chair reiterated that since Annex III of the Protocol serves as the basis of the work of the AHTEG, the Roadmap should be applicable to all LMOs. During the teleconference, it was suggested that in accommodating all LMOs in the roadmap, issues that are specific to commercial releases or field trial could be highlighted in the chapeau or in points to consider. It was noted that during the online discussion on LM mosquitoes, a question was raised as to whether the guidance document should focus on all LM mosquitoes or only on those that are in more advanced stages of development and, therefore, more likely to be introduced into the environment. Under the online discussions on the work of the SWG on Abiotic Stress, questions as to the scope of the guidance document and whether the document should address only environmental safety or should also include food/feed safety. In his comments, the AHTEG Chair emphasized the need for the guidance documents to focus on environmental safety. He further noted that since there exists abundant relevant scientific information on drought and salinity resistance, focus could be put on them. With regard to the scope of the guidance document on stacked genes or traits, the SWG Chair discussed the possibility of focusing on all types of stacked events and emphasized the importance of integrating the guidance document on stacked genes with the Roadmap for risk assessment.

5. In a further discussion on the scope of the documents, the AHTEG Chair noted that the guidance documents being developed should fully reflect the mandate given to the AHTEG and focus on scientific issues of risk assessment. He reiterated that issues that are not directly related to risk assessment as defined by the Protocol, such as socio-economic, ethical and legal considerations, should be kept out of the current discussions.

6. Other issues raised during the online discussions include: co-existence and out-crossing from LMOs to non-LMOs as important points to be included in the roadmap; the appropriateness of the terms used under the LM mosquitoes e.g. “population replacement” vs. “population suppression”. Under the online discussion group on stacked genes or traits, some questions were raised such as: (i) Is additional molecular characterization needed or is phenotypic characterization of the stacked events enough? (ii) How to choose the appropriate comparators? (iii) How to assess the interaction between the different traits? (iv) How should the issues of human health as well as intentional vs. unintentional introduction into the environment be addressed? The Chair of the SWG on Stacked Genes noted that the next draft version of the guidance document will highlight the issues where consensus has not yet been reached.

7. Under agenda item 3, the meeting discussed the challenges and difficulties that have been faced by the different SWGs such as the imbalance between the participation of experts from Parties *vis a vis* those from non-Parties and observers. The AHTEG Chair

recommended that the Chairs of the SWGs may wish to promote a more direct dialogue with experts from Parties on specific issues. Also raised by the Chairs of the SWGs on LM Mosquitoes and Abiotic Stress was the lack of specific expertise among the current pool of experts involved in the drafting of the guidance documents.

8. The AHTEG Chair took note of the low level of participation of experts in some SWGs and invited the Bureau to identify and recommend experts to join the discussions of these SWGs. The Rapporteur of the AHTEG pointed out that the World Health Organization is preparing a guidance document on LM mosquitoes and suggested that some of the experts involved in that initiative may be willing to join the discussions of the AHTEG SWG.

9. The Chair of the SWG on LM Mosquitoes inquired whether it would be possible to organize a face-to-face meeting of this SWG. The Secretariat explained that such a meeting is unlikely due to limited financial resources. The Secretariat further noted that the use of the online tools, such as discussion groups and real-time conferences, could serve as alternate resources for such meetings within and among the SWGs.

10. Under agenda item 4, the Chair of the SWG on the Roadmap suggested sharing the latest versions of the draft guidance documents among all four SWGs at least 2 weeks prior to the face-to-face meeting with the view to facilitating the integration of the work of the SWGs. He further noted that the process of interlinking the four guidance documents could be discussed during the October face-to-face meeting. He also proposed that the testing the functionality of the roadmap could be done by experts who were not involved in its development, and that, during the face-to-face meeting, the SWG could discuss questions and materials to be provided to the external experts who would run the tests.

11. The Chair of the SWG on Stacked Genes suggested that another point for discussion during the October face-to-face meeting be how to select publications that could be cited in all four guidance documents.

12. The Secretariat explained that according to the AHTEG Action Plan, the next round of online discussions is tentatively scheduled for November 2009. Nevertheless, additional discussion groups or real-time conferences may be organized within a short notice of one week by the Chairs of the AHTEG or of the SWGs indicating the desired period of the event and its participants.

13. The AHTEG Chair suggested that the Bureau should hold another teleconference prior to the face-to-face meeting in October.

14. The teleconference ended at 13:00 GMT.
