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**Geneva, 20 November – 8 December 2006**

Item 10 of the provisional agenda

**Review of the operation of the Convention  
as provided for in its Article XII**

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, EXCHANGE AND COOPERATION  
UNDERTAKEN BY AUSTRALIA IN THE  
FIELD OF BIOTECHNOLOGY**

Submitted by Australia

**Overview**

1. Australia sees technical assistance and cooperation in biotechnology inter alia as a means of strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and of addressing contemporary biological threats. Australia remains strongly committed to international economic and social development and to sharing the benefits of scientific and technological progress. Australia aims to remain a key player in the development of biotechnology for peaceful purposes and has a consistent record of providing technical assistance, facilitating the exchange of information and cooperating in a wide range of biotechnology related activities.

2. Australian scientific and technical assistance on matters relevant to the peaceful purposes of the BWC is focused on the Asia-Pacific region. Australia contributes to key international organisations including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Australia's technical assistance, exchange and cooperative programmes are coordinated by a number of key Australian Government agencies, including Australia's Agency for International Development (AusAID), the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and the Departments of Health and Ageing (DoHA), Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and the Department of Defence, including the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO). The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is developing a program to assist regional partners to enhance biosecurity and biosafety in consultation with other Australian Government agencies.

3. This paper outlines examples of cooperative activities currently undertaken by the Australian Government relevant to Article X of the BWC. Australian industry also conducts activities consistent with the BWC, including Article X. For an overview of these activities see <http://www.ausbiotech.org/index.asp>.

### **Publication, exchange and dissemination of information**

4. A number of organisations and working groups are actively engaged in the publication, exchange and dissemination of information. DoHA (<http://www.health.gov.au/>) coordinates and publishes many activities relating to human diseases, while DAFF (<http://www.affa.gov.au/>) has similar responsibilities for animal and plant diseases.

### **The provision of training and technical advice**

5. Australia is a leading provider of education in the Asia-Pacific Region. In 2006, there were around 18,000 international students enrolled at Australian education institutions in biotechnology and related disciplines. Students were enrolled in a variety of courses including:

- (i) Life sciences (1,500 enrolments);
- (ii) Health, community services (5,500);
- (iii) Nursing (4,500);
- (iv) Medical science, medicine (3,500);
- (v) Land and marine resources, animal husbandry (1,500);
- (vi) Pharmacy (1,000);
- (vii) Veterinary science (500).

6. In addition, this year 2,500 Australian Development Scholarships were provided to students from 38 countries to study a range of courses in Australia, including biotechnology.

### **Improvement and development of the capabilities of States Parties to monitor emerging and re-emerging diseases**

7. DoHA and DAFF assist countries in the Asia-Pacific region to enhance disease surveillance, diagnosis and response capabilities, including training programs on diagnosis, surveillance, detection, prevention and treatment of diseases. Notable recent examples relate to assisting with outbreaks of Severe Acquired Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and avian influenza. Australia has also shared best practice guidelines and advice on a wide range of communicable diseases, including hepatitis C, infection control, influenza pandemic planning, meningococcal disease control, food-borne diseases, antimicrobial resistance and sexually transmitted infections surveillance. The sharing of this information with interested parties is consistent with capacity-building measures designed to enhance and develop the capabilities of State Parties. Australia's policy for development assistance in health is outlined in the recent AusAID publication, *Helping Health Systems Deliver* (available at [http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/health\\_policy.pdf](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/health_policy.pdf)).

**Improvement and development of research capabilities through collaborative research programs and projects**

8. The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR; [www.aciar.gov.au](http://www.aciar.gov.au)) was established in 1982 to assist and encourage Australia's agricultural scientists to use their skills for the benefit of developing countries. The Centre's mandate is to improve the well-being of people in developing countries and Australia through international collaboration in research and related activities that develop sustainable agricultural systems and appropriate strategies for natural resource management. ACIAR assists developing countries to improve and develop their own research capabilities through diverse projects in fisheries, forestry, agricultural and horticultural biotechnology, and animal and crop science.

**Biological databases**

9. Australia contributes to numerous international academic, scientific and industrial databases that facilitate access to information in the field of biotechnology. Australian Government departments and agencies also publish regular reports and bulletins, dealing with a range of biotechnological issues, which are widely disseminated within the Asia-Pacific region and the broader international community. For example, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) maintains the Australian Bibliography of Agriculture, containing bibliographic records of materials covering all aspects of agriculture, together with references to information on forestry, fisheries, food sciences and human nutrition. This database is accessible to researchers in developing countries.

10. In addition, the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) contributes to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) BioTrack/BioBin database. This is a comprehensive, publicly accessible database of field trial and general release approvals of genetically modified organisms. Information from the BioTrack database is also available on the Biosafety Clearing House, established under the Cartagena Protocol, through the interoperability of these databases. Australia would be pleased to cooperate with the creation of further information networks which promote Article X objectives.

**Conclusion**

11. Australia will continue to seek new ways to participate in international efforts to provide technical assistance, publish and disseminate information, build capacity and collaborate in research activities consistent with the objectives of the BWC. Its efforts focus on the Asia-Pacific region, but it also cooperates with countries in other regions when its expertise is useful. Australia welcomes the opportunity to continue existing dialogues and to explore all possible avenues for further cooperation.

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