
**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the Development,
Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their
Destruction**

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Meeting of Experts

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Item 5 of the agenda

**Standing agenda item: cooperation and assistance,
with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation
and assistance under Article X**

Australia's Implementation of BWC Article X

Submitted by Australia

1. Australia places great importance on the implementation of Article X of the BWC, because we consider that implementation of Article X reinforces the security objectives of the BWC. Facilitating international exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful use of the life sciences helps to prevent the global spread of infectious diseases, builds capacity to respond to disease outbreaks (whether caused naturally or through the hostile use of biological agents or toxins) and can provide incentives for States to accede to the BWC.

2. In fulfilling our obligations under Article X, Australia considers that a broad range of activities fit within the scope of that article. Underpinning the facilitation of international exchange, as described in Article X, are the legislative, regulatory and policy arrangements which governments put in place domestically to allow for legitimate and beneficial activities and innovation in the life sciences, notably by industry and academic and research institutions.

3. As an example of such arrangements, the National Enabling Technologies Strategy of Australia's Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education supports the responsible development of enabling technologies, such as nanotechnology, biotechnology and other technologies as they emerge in Australia. The strategy complements other investments and non-sector-specific initiatives of the Australian Government in science, technology and innovation to support research, development and commercialisation in the life sciences industry.¹

¹ The Seventh Review Conference recognised "the important role of the private sector" in Article X implementation (BWC/CONF.VII/7 Part II paragraph 52).

4. Complementing the commercial, educative and collaborative activities of Australian industry and academic and research institutions internationally in Australia's implementation of Article X, many of the Australian Government's activities and international programs directly reflect or support exchange in biological science and technology for peaceful purposes.

5. Relevant activities include publicly available research conducted within Australian Government agencies as reported in Form C of Australia's annual BWC Confidence-Building Measure submission, which Australia makes public. Relevant international programs include Commonwealth-funded tertiary scholarships to citizens from developing countries around the globe (including for study in the life sciences) which have been an important component of Australia's efforts to achieve sustainable development since the 1950s.² These international programs also include Australia's government-to-government efforts in countering biological terrorism and building capacity to combat infectious diseases.

Countering biological terrorism

6. Australia's efforts in countering biological terrorism have included biosecurity training and undertaking collaborative gap analysis of diagnostic laboratories to identify and prioritise areas for enhancement. Australia's collaboration with partners have emphasised the need to implement national policies and practices which strike an appropriate balance between enabling peaceful biological research consistent with the objectives of the BWC, and minimising the possibility of such research and associated biological materials, equipment and technology from being misused.

7. Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with the support of other government agencies, has been directing particular efforts to build regional capacity in counter-terrorism efforts through funding of a number of initiatives in biological safety and security programs, mostly undertaken within the framework of ASEAN and ASEAN Regional Forum. For example, Australia has joined the Philippines and the United States in supporting a series of ARF biosecurity workshops. Most recently, in 2011, Australia co-sponsored a workshop which focused on strategies to strengthen and integrate infectious disease detection and surveillance.

8. The Australian Federal Police, through the Australian Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Data Centre (ACBRNDC), has engaged with regional partners on a range of CBRN issues including countering bioterrorism. Activities included CBRN awareness training for the Law Enforcement, First Responder and Public Health communities in South and South-East Asia. ACBRNDC has provided expert trainers to the INTERPOL's Regional (Counter) Bioterrorism Train-the-Trainer Courses run in South America, Central Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific. Since 2008, the ACBRNDC has also been developing communication and collaboration on CBRN issues (including bioterrorism) amongst the Law Enforcement community in South East Asia through annual CBRN Breakout Sessions at South East Asian Bomb Data Centre Working Group meetings.

Building capacity to combat infectious diseases

9. The prevention, detection and control of pandemics and emerging infectious diseases are a global public good which no one country can provide on its own. Australia

² For example, the Development Awards administered by the Australian Agency for International Development (www.ausaid.gov.au/scholar).

plays its part. Its efforts to address pandemics and emerging infectious diseases are part of an overarching commitment to the Millennium Development Goals; the Seventh Review Conference also affirmed such efforts as directly supporting the achievement of the BWC's objectives.³

10. Australia takes efforts to build capacity for addressing pandemics and emerging infectious diseases in our region seriously. Australia has committed over AUD200 million since 2003 for initiatives to strengthen prevention, detection and response capabilities. Australia has assisted partners to develop national pandemic preparedness plans and strengthen detection, prevention and control systems, resulting in improvements to partner States' ability to respond to pandemics across our region.

11. A range of Australian Government agencies are involved in these efforts, including the Australian Agency for International Development, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and the Australian Animal Health Laboratory within the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation.

12. In one of its programs, Australia is working in partnership with a neighbouring country to build animal health institutions to increase capacity to recognise new diseases emerging in animals which may also infect humans. (Avian influenza, SARS, swine flu, Hendra and Nipah are examples of such diseases.). This institutional strengthening of animal health systems to meet international animal health standards established by the OIE will have a number of benefits including:

(a) increased capability to detect and identify new diseases emerging at the human-animal interface;

(b) increased capability to detect, identify and control endemic zoonotic diseases which affect human health; and

(c) increased capability to detect, identify and control endemic animal diseases which reduce animal production and affect rural livelihoods.

13. This capacity-building includes technical training and advice on policy development aims, among other objectives, to reduce the risk of laboratory workers' contracting infectious agents (biosafety) and also to reduce the risk of infective agents' escaping from laboratories (biosecurity).

14. This is work at the national, provincial and district levels. Sustainability is a key program principle: the program is supporting, mentoring, advising and facilitating. And supporting the animal health system is not all about technical expertise – it requires holistic effort; for example, one key activity has been working with district governments to help them prepare budgets which can support animal health activities.

15. Other capacity-building projects in our region have focused on:

(a) training in plant pest surveillance and diagnostics;

(b) strengthening regional plant health information sharing through development of remote diagnostic networks;

(c) providing high-resolution microscopes and equipment for remote diagnostics; and

³ BWC/CONF.VII/7 Part II paragraph 53.

(d) providing training to facilitate partners to identify the gaps in regional biosecurity plus solutions and possible implementation mechanisms.

16. This is only a partial snapshot of the collaborative work Australia is doing with partners in its region. To underline Australia's continuing engagement, the Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, announced on 19 November 2011 a AUD24 million commitment over four years to further work with States in Australia's region to combat infectious diseases in people and animals with new laboratories, plans to prepare for pandemics and better veterinary services. That commitment includes:

(a) AUD 12 million to the WHO to assist States in the Asia Pacific to build better laboratories, develop national pandemic preparedness plans and implement innovative surveillance systems; and

(b) AUD12.7 million to the OIE to strengthen veterinary services and to better manage animal-borne diseases in our region.

17. Australia's continuing commitment to build capacities which can be applied to outbreaks of disease (whether natural or deliberate in cause) is a practical and mutually beneficial effort within the scope of Article X toward better health, social and economic outcomes and better security.
