

Public Research & Regulation

Foundation with the objective to involve the public research sector in regulations and international agreements relevant to modern biotechnology

Second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (Montreal, Canada, 30 May - 3 June 2005).

Summary of statements for MOP2

Introduction

Many of the very serious challenges in the agricultural production of food, feed and fibres cannot be solved by conventional breeding alone. Therefore public research institutions worldwide are working together on finding alternative solutions, including modern biotechnology.

The Public Research and Regulation Initiative main aim of participating in MOP2 is to inform participants about the ongoing public research worldwide, and to assist delegates in understanding the implications for public research of the various options being debated.

Public researchers are not asking for lower risk standards for their activities. What we ask for is that procedural requirements are commensurate with the level of risk involved and a decision making process that takes into account the potential benefits of the application of modern biotechnology.

General view with regard to the negotiations

With many delegations there seem to be some underlying misperceptions:

- There is a widespread perception that biotechnology is mainly the domain of a few big multinationals and that LMOs will mainly be exported from developed countries to developing countries.
- Second, in many interventions there seems to be the underlying assumption that LMOs are inherently hazardous.

Liability:

The Public Research and Regulation Initiative is very concerned that a number of Parties appear to support the development of a liability regime that could effectively stop public research in modern biotechnology. Some of the suggested approaches would inhibit, for example, exchange of research material among institutions and technology transfer, both of which are fundamental to public research work.

Public Research & Regulation

Foundation with the objective to involve the public research sector in regulations and international agreements relevant to modern biotechnology

Risk assessment

The general principles and methodology for risk assessment as laid down in Annex III in our view represent an excellent reflection of the effective and consistent practice of risk assessment that started with the 1986 OECD Recombinant DNA Guidelines. We fully endorse the important concepts of the science-based, case-by-case, comparative and transparent approach.

The Public Research and Regulation Initiative is preparing additional guidance to public researchers in presenting the risk assessment in notifications that are to be submitted to competent authorities. Such guidance, which would also be helpful to those same authorities, would take the user step-by-step through the process of risk assessment.

Notifications

We hope that the MOP explicitly acknowledges that the notification requirements under Article 8 should be differentiated according to the type of application, similar to the approach in Annex III, where paragraph 6 reads: “The required information may vary in nature and level of detail from case to case, depending on the living modified organism concerned, its intended use and the likely potential receiving environment”.

Socio – economic considerations

Article 26 on socio-economic considerations is a very important article, because it confirms that Governments in their decision making on intended transboundary movement of LMOs may, within the boundaries of their international obligations, take into account both positive and negative socio-economic considerations.

Public awareness and public participation

Public awareness and public participation are important mechanisms to ensure that the public is provided with a balanced view of both the potential benefits and the potential risks of the development and use of LMOs. In fact, we believe that there is an urgent need for an extra effort in public awareness, because there are a number of persistent misconceptions in the public debate about modern biotechnology and the risks involved of applying LMOs

Other scientific and technical issues

In order to facilitate the exchange of research material, we propose, as a matter of urgency, that work be started on formulating criteria that will allow for the scientifically based identification of activities with LMOs that can be exempted from the AIA procedure. Such activities could, for example, be small-scale confined field trials with specific crops and traits.