

CGRFA 15 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 22 JANUARY 2015

CGRFA 15 delegates met in plenary throughout the day to finalize discussions on aquatic genetic resources (GR) and the composition of intergovernmental technical working groups (ITWGs). They also considered the implementation of the Commission's Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW), establishment of networks of national focal points to the Commission, cooperation with international instruments and organizations, the status of the Commission, and other business.

AQUATIC GR

ITWG ON AQUATIC GR: Reporting back from informal consultations, NAMIBIA presented consensus text on the establishment of an *Ad Hoc* ITWG on Aquatic GR. In order to facilitate the preparation and review of the first report on the State of the World's (SoW) Aquatic GR, Parties agreed to establish the ITWG with the statutes proposed in document CGRFA-15/15/18. The Commission will consider at its next session whether the ITWG will continue after this initial period. Parties further requested the Secretariat to ensure complementarity between the work of the CGRFA and FAO's Commission on Fisheries (COFI) and invite its Advisory Working Group on Aquatic Genetic Resources and Technologies to contribute to the SoW Report on Aquatic GR.

PREPARATION OF THE SOW ON AQUATIC GR: ARGENTINA said that, following informal deliberations, she agrees with Canada's proposal to invite "regional and international organizations and institutions" rather than "relevant stakeholders" to contribute to the preparation of the SoW on Aquatic GR.

THE COMMISSION'S MODE OF OPERATION

COMPOSITION OF ITWGS: In the morning, BRAZIL reported that the informal group decided to increase the number of representatives from the Near East from three to four in all sectoral ITWGs, noting that further discussion on the composition of the ITWGs should take into account fundamental discussions on the methodology and the criteria utilized for composing the Commission's ITWGs.

In the afternoon, after further informal consultations, BRAZIL presented a compromise on the selection of alternate representatives. She said the group had decided to amend the statutes of all ITWGs to state that the Commission shall elect at each regular session a list of up to two alternate members

for each region, which will replace, in the order in which they appear on the list, any member who has resigned. Both elected and alternate members will be eligible for re-election.

The amended statutes further require delegates to confirm their participation in an ITWG meeting. A member who is not able to attend, will be replaced in a timely manner by one of the elected alternate members from the same region. In case a member does not attend the meeting, the ITWG, in consultation with the regional group, may replace this member, on an *ad hoc* basis, by a member of the Commission from the same region that is present at the meeting.

In response to a request by the US, it was confirmed that the new rules will apply also to the ITWG on Aquatic GR. Delegates accepted the proposal.

STATUS OF THE COMMISSION: The Secretariat introduced CGRFA-15/15/22 on recent developments with regard to observers attending meetings of FAO, noting that the existing rules date from 1957 and limit participation to international NGOs, whereas in practice, civil society is increasingly involved in FAO meetings on an informal, no-objection basis. She explained that the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (CCLM) had prepared a 2013 study including proposed rules and procedures that were submitted to the FAO Council, and that regional consultations are ongoing.

EUROPE pledged to contribute to these consultations so as to reach agreement without undue delay. The Chair observed that the Commission needs to await the decision of the FAO Council, and delegates meanwhile took note of the document.

MYPOW

MYPOW IMPLEMENTATION: The Secretariat presented document CGRFA-15/15/20.1, which provides information on human and financial resources available for implementing the Commission's Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) and outlines the Commission's work in the context of FAO's Programme of Work and Budget. She noted that document CGRFA-15/15/Inf.29 includes an updated implementation plan for the Commission's MYPOW to be annexed to the Commission's Strategic Plan 2014-2023.

BRAZIL, with EUROPE and ARGENTINA, proposed the inclusion of an item on the Commission's agenda to reflect the important role of GRFA for food security and nutrition, and encouraged the Commission to further work on raising awareness. AFRICA and EUROPE suggested that the role of GRFA be recognized in all of FAO's strategic objectives.



The Secretariat noted that revising the MYPOW to include food security would mean several years of delay. She suggested instead engaging with the narrative linking biodiversity to food security and cooperating with the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), for example, by organizing side events during CFS Week and developing guidelines on the importance of GR and national food security policies.

AUSTRALIA stressed that the Commission and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGR) should play an important role in raising awareness and understanding regarding the role of plant GRFA for food security. He added that all efforts should be made on a sound technical and scientific basis. BRAZIL highlighted awareness raising and collaboration with the ITPGR and the CFS.

AFRICA suggested inviting donors to continue providing extra-budgetary resources. EUROPE underlined the need for detailed information on future funding priorities, noting that while a single trust fund for all sectors may be more efficient and visible, other options should be explored to accommodate sector-specific donors.

The US suggested preparing a follow-up document to the SoW Report on Aquatic GR, which may include the development of elements related to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, aiming to maintain a broad genetic basis and ensure the sustainable use and conservation of aquatic GR.

NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS: The Secretariat presented document CGRFA-15/15/20.2 on the establishment of National Focal Points (NFPs) to the Commission to facilitate its future work.

Many regions and countries noted that the establishment of NFPs will enhance the collaboration between the Commission and the Parties. The US asked for clarification regarding the role and structure of the suggested network of NFPs, and the Secretariat explained that the network will support the exchange of related information. NAMIBIA called for clearly defined terms of reference for the NFPs.

COOPERATION

The Secretariat introduced the document CGRFA-15/15/21. International and intergovernmental organizations presented on their collaborative activities with CGRFA and their activities related to the protection of GRFA (CGRFA-15/15/Inf.30-34).

BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL highlighted its support to CGRFA to prepare the SoW reports, as well as its collaborative activities for the implementation of the Global Plan of Action on Forest GR. The WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION (WIPO) underscored current negotiations in the WIPO Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore on an international legal instrument that is expected to address traditional knowledge and ABS related to GR.

The GLOBAL CROP DIVERSITY TRUST presented initiatives to ensure the conservation and availability of plant diversity for food and agriculture, including by supporting some of the world's most important genebanks. With NORWAY, he provided updates on the Global Seed Vault initiative. UNCCD noted that 2015 is the international year of soils, pointing to the need to acknowledge the relevance of soils for sustainable development. The GLOBAL FORUM ON AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH highlighted work on farmers' rights, including fostering their participation in policy making. ITPGR Governing Body (GB) Chair Matthew Worrell (Australia) highlighted recent GB decisions to promote further collaboration with the Commission work and avoid duplication of efforts.

EUROPE suggested that the Commission consider cooperating with the CBD's Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions to increase coordination and exchange information with other biodiversity-related conventions. BRAZIL added that closer collaboration with international organizations on, *inter alia*, forest GRFA is needed. AFRICA supported collaboration and partnerships, noting that the Commission should keep a leading role in the area of GRFA.

CANADA supported the transfer of plant GRFA tasks from the Commission to the ITPGR, "where feasible," and addressing the issue at CGRFA 16. The US noted the need for further information before making a formal decision on task transfer. BRAZIL asked for information on the financial implications of such a transfer. ETHIOPIA said that such a transfer may also imply changes in the mandate of both institutions, noting that a technical paper could contribute to clarifying these implications.

OTHER MATTERS

DATE AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING: The Secretariat proposed, and delegates agreed, that CGRFA 16 take place from 30 January - 3 February 2017 in Rome, Italy.

ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIRS: The following individuals were nominated as Vice-Chairs representing their region: Chang-Yeon Cho (Republic of Korea) for Asia; Charles Nying (Cameroon) for Africa; François Pythoud (Switzerland) for Europe; Larissa Maria Lima Costa (Brazil) for GRULAC; Javad Mozafari Hashjin (Iran) for the Near East; Christine Dawson (US) for North America; and William Wigmore (Cook Islands) for the Southwest Pacific.

Delegates elected Chang-Yeon Cho as the next CGRFA Chair, by acclamation.

IN THE CORRIDORS

With the weather forecast announcing that the sun will soon shine again in rainy Rome, CGRFA delegates accomplished their work almost a day ahead of schedule, leading observers to wonder what was the magic formula that enabled such efficient decision making.

Addressing conflicting issues in informal discussions at the sidelines of the plenary seemed to be part of the winning recipe. One delegate defined the key factor as "sufficient" decision making: a method that consists of making decisions that allow the Commission to continue working, while avoiding opening any major "Pandora's box." For example, while the Commission gave a green light to the creation of an ITWG on aquatic GR, it refrained from engaging in broader international discussions of marine issues, limiting the ITWG's mandate and duration to only preparing the State of the World report on aquatic GR. Delegates were also prudent in dealing with the long-standing Near East request for an additional representative: while the region got an extra representative in each of the existing ITWGs, the Commission did not revisit the abiding and unresolved question of how regional representation should be decided, thus avoiding difficult discussions.

Smiling delegates boasted in the corridors that other international fora should learn from their effective formula. "We can't deny that they managed to tackle an impressive number of agenda items in an equally impressive record time," said a participant, as he headed out unexpectedly early into the winter twilight.

ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS: The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of CGRFA-15 will be available on Monday, 26 January 2015 online at: <http://www.iisd.ca/biodiv/cgrfa15/>