

Third Meeting of GMOs (Control of Release) Expert Group
Confirmed Minutes of the Third Meeting

Date : 8 May 2015 (Friday)
Time : 2:30 – 5:02 p.m.
Venue : Room 701, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department,
7/F, Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices, 303 Cheung Sha Wan
Road, Kowloon

ATTENDANCE

Chairman

Professor WONG Woon-chung Jonathan, M.H., J.P.

Members

Professor LAM Hon-ming

Dr. LAU Lok-ting Terence

Ms. LAU Yuen-yee Vicky

Dr. LEUNG Mei-yee Kenneth

Dr. MAN Chi-sum, J.P.

Mr. SO Kwok-yin Ken

Dr. TSE Tin-yau Anthony

Ms. WONG Lai-yin Idy

Dr. SO Ping-man Assistant Director (Conservation), Agriculture,
Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)

Dr. WAN Yuen-kong Principal Medical and Health Officer,
Department of Health

Ms. LI Man-yan Sian Senior Administrative Officer (Nature Conservation),
Environmental Protection Department

Secretary

Ms. TSANG Yu-man Conservation Officer (Biodiversity) 3, AFCD

IN ATTENDANCE

AFCD

Mr. CHAN Kin-fung Simon Senior Conservation Officer (Biodiversity), AFCD

Dr. NG Sai-chit Conservation Officer (Biodiversity) 4, AFCD

ABSENT WITH APOLOGIES

Professor CHENG Hon-ki Christopher

Professor CHU Ka-hou

Mr. WONG Hing-keung

WELCOME MESSAGE

1. The Chairman welcomed all members to the first meeting of the term (2013-2015) of the Genetically Modified Organisms (Control of Release) Expert Group (the Expert Group), especially Prof. LAM Hon-ming who was a new member of the Expert Group. The Chairman also welcomed Dr. SO Ping-man, Dr. WAN Yuen-kong and Dr. NG Sai-chit joining the meeting for the first time. The Chairman told members that Prof. Christopher CHENG, Prof. CHU Ka-hou and Mr. WONG Hing-keung had apologised for their absence in the meeting.
2. The Chairman announced that Dr. LEUNG Sze-lun had retired from the Expert Group since September 2013 after he had resigned from the WWF Hong Kong due to personal reasons. The Chairman expressed gratitude and appreciation for Dr. LEUNG's support to the Expert Group.
3. The Chairman informed members that, as an established practice, to facilitate the taking of meeting minutes, sound recording would be made during the meeting. The audio records would be destroyed after the meeting minutes had been confirmed.
4. The Chairman also reminded members about the declaration of interests and transparency measures adopted by the Expert Group. Members were requested to follow the declaration of interests and transparency measures.

AGENDA ITEMS

I. Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 11 April 2013

5. The Chairman told members that the draft minutes of the last meeting held on 11 April 2013 was circulated on 13 May 2013 and no comments were received. As members had no further comments in the meeting, the draft meeting minutes were confirmed.

II. Report on the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties Serving as the Meeting of the Parties (COP-MOP 7) to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

(Discussion paper: GMO/01/2015)

6. The Chairman invited Mr. Simon CHAN to present the discussion paper (GMO/01/2015) which reported on the decisions that had made in the 7th Meeting of the Parties (COP-MOP 7) to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (the Protocol) and the implications on the implementation of the Protocol in Hong Kong.

7. Members noted the decisions made in the COP-MOP 7.

III. Survey on GMOs in Hong Kong during 2013-14

(Discussion Paper: GMO/02/2015)

8. Invited by the Chairman, Ms. TSANG Yu-man briefed members on the discussion paper (GMO/02/2015) that summarised the findings of the survey conducted during 2013-14 on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in local markets and farms.

9. Upon a member's enquiry, Mr. Simon CHAN replied that among the two papaya seed samples purchased from local seed suppliers tested positive for GMO, one belonged to the Taiwan Papaya Ringspot Virus (PRSV) resistance variety and another belonged to the 55-1 variety. The seed suppliers were informed of the testing results and reminded of the control of the Genetically Modified Organisms (Control of Release) Ordinance (the Ordinance).

10. In response to a member's question, another member clarified that the extent of GM papaya contamination was related to the geographical distance between the

non-GM and the GM papaya plants. A member further asked whether the Government had any information on the closest distance between a locally grown non-GM papaya tree and its nearby GM papaya plant. Mr. Simon CHAN answered that such information was not available and told members that only 13.6% of non-GM papaya trees were found to carry seeds with GM materials, suggesting limited extent of GM papaya contamination. The Chairman shared with members the research on GM papayas conducted by the Hong Kong Organic Resources Centre. Among the 40 locally grown non-GM papaya fruit samples collected, it was found that 30% of them carried seeds with GM materials and the percentage was higher than that conducted by AFCD (i.e. 13.6%).

11. Regarding the GMOs survey plan, a member recommended that more sampling should be conducted on crops which might likely be genetically modified, for example tomatoes and soya beans. Another member concurred. The Chairman further questioned the sources of collected samples. Mr. Simon CHAN said that the GMOs survey plans were reviewed and updated annually making reference to the list of GMOs commercialised or under field trial overseas. Small samples of crops that were likely to be genetically modified were also collected for testing. The collected samples covered various imported and locally grown crops available in local markets and farms as well as other sources. Only live and reproducible samples were collected. Mr. Simon CHAN suggested that the GMOs survey plan 2015 would be circulated to all members for comments.

12. In response to a member's enquiry, Mr. Simon CHAN replied that the Biosafety Clearing House (<http://bcd.cbd.int>) provided the information of GMOs approved for commercial release or GMOs under field trials in other countries. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (the Department) also referred to the GM Crop Database provided by the Centre for Environmental Risk Assessment and conducted literature review in formulating its annual GMOs survey plan. Another member supplemented that members could advise the Department on the GMOs survey plan should they receive any information on the latest development of GMOs.

13. A member noted that more local farmers were being involved in paddy rice farming in Hong Kong and recommended that rice grains should also be tested for genetic modification. Another member concurred and supplemented that GM rice had not been approved for commercialisation in China. Mr. Simon CHAN told members that some rice grains had been collected and tested negative in the market survey. He added that the Department would increase the sampling effort on GM rice as paddy

rice farming was getting more popular in Hong Kong.

14. In view of the religious practice of releasing wildlife to the wild and the potential adverse impact of environmental release of GM aquarium fish, a member considered that a mechanism should be established to control the environmental release of GM aquarium fish. An intelligence system was proposed. The Chairman advised that the Department should educate the general public not to release aquarium fish to the wild. A member added that the educational materials should be produced to provide the information of the GM fluorescent fish and the adverse impact of environmental release. Another member suggested that the Government should provide leaflets to aquarium pet fish retailers for free distribution to general public to educate them not to release GM aquarium fish. Another member also suggested that the education work on GMOs should be more focussed on GM fluorescent fish and GM papayas. In response to the mechanism on the control of GM aquarium fish, Mr. Simon CHAN replied that the Department conducted regular surveys on GM aquarium fish available from local retailers to closely monitor the status of GMOs in Hong Kong. Also, the Department regularly inspected aquarium fish shops selling GM fluorescent fish to check if appropriate measures had been taken to prevent the fish from escaping to the environment. Letters had also been issued to aquarium pet fish retailers who were found to sell GM fluorescent fish during the market survey to remind them about the control of the Ordinance and the relevant import/export documentation requirements. They were also reminded to take measures to confine their GM fluorescent fish in contained use and to advise their customers of doing so to prevent the environmental release of these GMOs. In addition, local freshwater habitats were also closely monitored under the territory-wide biodiversity survey programme for the presence of exotic fish, including GM fluorescent fish. So far, GM fish had not been found in the local environment. In addition, the Department also promoted the responsible pet ownership programmes regularly to educate the public on responsible pet ownership. Nevertheless, Mr. Simon CHAN supplemented that the Department would enhance the sampling effort on GM fluorescent fish as well as the education on environmental release of GM fluorescent fish.

15. To sum up, the Chairman concluded that the Department should circulate the GMOs survey plan 2015 to members for comments and the Department should also keep track of the latest development of GMOs.

(Post-meeting Note: The GMOs Survey Plan 2015 was circulated to members for comments on 12 May 2015.)

IV. Review of the Exemption of Live Recombinant Veterinary Vaccines

(Discussion Paper: GMO/03/2015)

16. The Chairman invited Dr. NG Sai-chit to take members through the discussion paper (GMO/03/2015) that reported the findings of a recent risk assessment of commercially available live recombinant veterinary vaccines and sought members' views and comments on the review of the exemption of live recombinant veterinary vaccines.

17. A member recommended that the Department should keep an inventory of applied live recombinant veterinary vaccines in Hong Kong. Mr. Simon CHAN told members that there was no administration and application of live recombinant veterinary vaccines in recent years. Nevertheless, the Department would be informed when there was an administration of live recombinant veterinary vaccines in emergency situation such as an outbreak of a pandemic disease.

18. Members noted the review on the exemption of live recombinant veterinary vaccines. In conclusion, the Expert Group supported the recommendation of the discussion paper (GMO/03/2015) that the current control and exemption under the Ordinance should be maintained, subject to further review in three years' time.

V. Review of the Exemption of Genetically Modified Papayas

(Discussion Paper: GMO/04/2015)

19. The Chairman invited Dr. NG Sai-chit to take members through the discussion paper (GMO/04/2015) that reported the findings of a recent risk assessment of GM papayas and sought members' views and comments on the review of the exemption of GM papayas.

20. Upon a member's enquiry, Mr. Simon CHAN replied that the Genetically Modified Organisms (Control of Release) (Exemption) Notice (which took effect on 23 June 2012) exempted all varieties of GM papayas from the application of section 5 (restrictions on release into environment and maintenance of lives of GMOs) of the Ordinance and two commercialised lines of GM papayas (GM papaya with the unique identifier code of CUH-CP551-8 and GM papaya with the transformation event code of Huanong-1) from the application of section 7 (restrictions on import of GMOs intended for release into environment) of the Ordinance. Mr. Simon CHAN added that

the import and export of GMOs (including those intended for release into the environment, for contained use or for direct consumption as food or feed, or for processing) should comply with the documentation requirements providing contacts of the importer/exporter and details of the GMOs.

21. The Chairman and a member enquired whether there were new varieties of GM papayas which were currently under field trials. Mr. Simon CHAN replied that the Department was advised by the Expert Group to monitor the latest progress and development of GM papayas in the first meeting on 5 July 2011. Based on the latest findings, no new variety of GM papayas was developed. The member further asked the reason of the dominance of TW-lines among the sampled GM papayas. Mr. Simon CHAN replied that it was suspected that the TW-lines might have a higher resistance to the PRSV compared with the 55-1 lines and Huanong-1 lines.

22. Another member asked if the Department had any information on the identities of the owners who grew papaya plants in the territory. Mr. Simon CHAN answered that such information was not available and advised that the maintenance of GM papayas in Hong Kong was exempted under the Ordinance.

23. A member advised that the Department should educate the general public and local farmers not to grow papayas in their backyards or along the edges of farmlands from the seeds obtained from the consumed papaya fruits. For those who would like to grow papaya plants, they should purchase papaya seeds from reliable seed traders. Two other members echoed. One of them added that school education was also important as some teachers and students might unknowingly grow papaya plants in their school gardens.

24. The Chairman and two members suggested that in order to discourage the planting of GM papaya trees in the territory, supply of reliable sources of non-GM papaya seeds or seedlings was very important. Two members opined that the dominance of GM papayas would affect the farming of non-GM papayas and hence the agricultural diversity. One of them emphasised that identification of GM and non-GM zones was important in Hong Kong so as to protect the rights of organic farmers. Dr. P.M. SO reminded that papayas were exotic species and the establishment of GM and non-GM agricultural zones was outside the scope of Expert Group.

25. A member concurred with the review of the exemption of GM papayas and opined that it was highly unlikely for GM papayas to pose any adverse biosafety

effect on the biodiversity of local environment considering GM papayas were produced under the same mechanisms. Another member echoed.

26. Regarding the survey on the distribution profile of GM papayas in the territory, one member considered the Department should continue the survey on the geographical distribution of locally grown GM papaya in order to monitor the percentage of GM papayas in the territory and the sampling size of locally grown papaya in the survey should not be reduced drastically. Other members concurred. Dr. P.M. SO explained that the survey on the distribution profile of local GM papayas had been conducted since 2011. The results indicated that around half of the locally grown papayas being sampled were genetically modified and such percentage would unlikely be changed dramatically in the coming years. In this regard, in order to monitor the ratio of GM papayas to non-GM papayas that grew locally, it was proposed that the sampling effort on the survey on the distribution profile of GM papayas in the territory could be slightly reduced so that the resources could be allocated to other crops that were more likely to be genetically modified. A member further proposed reducing the sampling period from three years to two years instead of reducing the sampling number of locally grown papayas. The Chairman and another member supported the proposal of shortening sampling years. Dr. P.M. SO suggested that the GMOs survey plan 2015 on papayas would be circulated to members for comments.

27. In conclusion, the Expert Group considered the review of the exemption acceptable. Members did not have adverse comments on the recommendation of the discussion paper (GMO/04/2015) that the current control and exemption of GM papayas should be maintained, subject to further review in three years' time.

VI. Any Other Business

28. There were no other issues to discuss.

VII. Date of Next Meeting

29. The Chairman said the members would be informed of the meeting date in due course.

30. The meeting adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

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