

## Short Communication

# The Public Research and Regulation Initiative

Piet van der Meer\*

The Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI) aims to involve the public research sector in international agreements that are relevant to modern biotechnology, such as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Aarhus Convention.

The PRRI is set up in three phases:

1. **Phase 1:** 'Raising awareness phase': consulting the public research community about the need for an organised involvement in international agreements and negotiations (2004).
2. **Phase 2:** 'Try out phase': Involvement of public research scientists in the Meetings of the Parties to the Biosafety Protocol and to the Aarhus Convention (2005).
3. **Phase 3:** A multi year project for structured involvement of the public research sector in relevant international agreements and their national implementation (2006 onwards).

As part of Phase 1, the public research community was consulted in a number of international meetings, such as BioAlexandria, (April 2004, Egypt), IPBO Course (August 2004, Belgium), ABIC 2004, (September 2004, Germany), 8th IBRS, (September 2004, France), 'Plants for the Future', (October 2004, Belgium), NAS 'Global Challenges' (October 2004, USA), GMO Guidelines project (January 2005, Switzerland), Cartagena Protocol Coordination and Liaison Groups on biosafety capacity building (January 2005, Canada), and the Conference Plant Made Pharmaceuticals (February 2005, Canada).

---

\* Horizons SPRL, Belgium. Email: pietvandermeer@cs.com

The feedback from these and other meetings revealed a broad consensus among scientists that the public research sector needs to be involved in international agreements and negotiations.

As part of Phase 2, public research sector scientists were, among others, involved in MOP2 to the Biosafety Protocol (31 May–3 June 2005). Participation in MOP2 to the Biosafety Protocol included an introductory seminar, (3-4 March 2005) and Participation in MOP2 (30 May – 3 June 2005), preceded by a preparatory meeting in the weekend before MOP2. The introductory seminar was held on 3-4 March 2005, in the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center, USA. The over 50 Participants came from 20 countries in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Western Europe and North America, and from 10 international organisations. The introductory seminar addressed: 1) Introduction to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, 2) Implementation of the CPB - national regulations , 3) Introduction to MOP negotiations and the topics discussed, 4) The road to MOP2 – participation in MOP2.

Over 30 Participants participated in MOP2 to the Biosafety Protocol with the support of the PRRI.

The participants came from 19 countries in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Western Europe and North America, and from international organisations.

The main objectives of the participation of the PRRI in MOP2 to the Biosafety Protocol were:

- Making delegates aware that a substantial part of the research on modern biotechnology is conducted for the public good in public research institutes worldwide.
- Making delegates aware of the concerns of the public research sector about the implications of the different options they were discussing.
- Assisting the negotiators by making the scientific knowledge available to the delegates.

To achieve these goals, the PRRI organized side events and attended side events of others, made interventions, held meetings with other delegations and groups, engaged in informal discussions with delegates. The statements prepared by the PRRI are available on the web site.

Based on the feedback from the PRRI participants and others, the Steering Committee has concluded that:

- Public researchers have become aware of the need to participate in international negotiations and are prepared to invest time and resources.
- Experience with participation in MOP2 has shown that participation can be effective.
- Subject to the availability of funds, PRRI will participate in MOP3 (March 2006, Brazil).

With its participation in MOP3, the PRRI aims to achieve the same overall objectives as outlined above and to provide detailed input on the substantive issues of MOP3, such as handling, transport, packaging and identification, liability and redress, subsidiary bodies, monitoring and reporting, and assessment and review.

For the activities of Phases 1 and 2, the Governments of Canada, Switzerland and the United States, the private sector organisation CropLife International, and organisations such as the Syngenta Foundation and the Institute made financial contributions available for Plant Biotechnology for Developing Countries in Ghent, Belgium.

Based on the positive results and feedback of phase 2, the PRRI is currently preparing:

1. Follow up of MOP2 and participation in MOP3 to the Biosafety Protocol (March 2006)
2. A project proposal for Phase 3.

The proposal for the multi year project will be submitted to the European Commission, governments, national and international organisations, and the private sector, aiming at obtaining sufficient funding for a 3 year project by late 2006.