

1ST PLENARY MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL BIOECONOMY FORUM

Brussels, 30 November 2017

Centre Albert Borschette (CCAB), Room 3D
Rue Froissart, 36; B-1040 Brussels

Minutes

1. Opening of meeting and introduction

The EC Chair, John Bell, welcomed the participants of the 1st plenary meeting of the International Bioeconomy Forum, he thanked the Canadian delegation for offering to co-chair the plenary and for hosting part of the events in their Mission in Brussels and the New Zealand delegation for organising the workshop on ICT in food systems.

The EC chair reminded the participants that the creation of an international bioeconomy forum responds to one of the objectives of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy of 2012 and its Action Plan, to foster international policy dialogues in order to raise awareness, at international level, of the important role that the bioeconomy can play in achieving global policy objectives.

The EC chair underlined the importance of having an international bioeconomy forum to share the ideas of the participants and connect the communities that each participant is working with, in a very focussed and practical way, through limited streams of work that really have to be delivered and through working groups that have the support of the plenary. One of the objectives of the Forum will be to help the participants to align the respective research programs and policy initiative.

The EC chair asked the participants if they wished for any modifications of the agenda. No modification was requested.

2. Round table presentation

The Canadian Chair, Gilles Saindon, mentioned the main objectives of the meeting:

- Define members and observers of the Forum;
- Find an agreement on the governance structure and basic working modalities for the Forum;
- Define the vision and the next steps for the development of the Forum.

He then launched a tour the table to allow the participants to introduce themselves. Participants at the plenary meeting were:

Canada:

- Gilles Saindon, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Technology Branch (STB), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC);
 - Christiane Deslauriers, Director General, Coastal Region, STB, AAFC, representing several Canadian agencies (forestry, fisheries, natural resources, regulatory);
 - Charles Kounkou, Senior Policy Analyst, STB, AAFC;
 - Anne-Hélène Mathey, Director Economic Analysis, Natural Resources Canada;
 - Benoit Girard, Director Research, Development and Technology, STB, AAFC;;
 - Roxan Hooshangi, Trade Commissioner (Agricultural Affairs), Canada Mission to the EU;
- and
- Michael Willmott, first secretary for Science and Technology, Canada Mission to the EU.

US:

- Margaret Cavanaugh, Deputy Assistant Director for Biological Sciences, National Science Foundation, contact also for other agencies such as agriculture and health.
- Sonia Ortega, Head of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Europe and Eurasia Office;

Korea:

- Oh Cheon Kwon, Director/ICT NCP/ETRI Representative/Technology;
- Jasmin Song, NCP at Korea-EU research centre.

South Africa:

- Vinny Pillay, S&T counsellor, Minister Science and Technology;

New Zealand:

- Max Kennedy, Manager Contestable Investments, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment;

- Bruce McCallum, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

India:

- Rajendra P. Singh, S&T counsellor, Mission of India to the European Union (representing the department of biotechnologies, DBT).

Argentina:

- Alejandro Nestor Mentaberry, Coordinator of the Science and Technology Cabinet, Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación Productiva (MYNCIT);

- Mariano Jordan, Director of international cooperation, MYNCIT;

- Guillermo Alberto Simunovich, S&T counsellor, Argentinian representation to the EU.

China:

- Shuang-Jiang Liu, Director of the Institute of Microbiology, CAS.

Australia:

- Alex Cooke, S&T counsellor, Mission of Australia to the European Union.

Standing Committee on Agricultural Research

- Raymond Kelly, Irish representative in the SCAR, representing Member States in the IBF.

Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO):

- Zoe Druilhe, Liaison Officer, Food and Agriculture Organisation

European Commission:

- John Bell, Director of the directorate "Bioeconomy" in DG RTD

- Waldemar Kütt, Head of Unit of the "Strategy" unit in the directorate "Bioeconomy" DG RTD;

- Enrico Prezio, Policy officer – International Cooperation, in the "Strategy" unit in the directorate "Bioeconomy" DG RTD.

3. International Bioeconomy Governance

The EC chair underlined the importance of giving a governance structure to the Forum, so that new members in the future could be integrated in the Forum following clear guidelines.

The EC chair recalled that a first concept note containing a proposal for governance for the IBF had been distributed to the participants in August 2017. Comments were received from Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These comments have been integrated in the text of the concept note and a new version has been circulated on 22/11/2017.

The EC chair asked if any of the participants would intervene with further comments or observation that they weren't able to submit before the meeting.

The EC chair highlighted some aspects of the concept note such as the difference between the status of member and observer and the procedure to propose a new working group.

The European Commission informed the participants that a template for the proposal of a working group will be prepared and distributed to the participants.

The EC chair reminded the participants of the importance that each country nominates a "Sherpa" (contact point) for the IBF.

After this the EC chair opened the floor for comments/questions:

- It was asked how the international organisations will be involved in the Forum (South Africa);

- It was asked if the cooperation between working groups could be reflected in the text of the concept note (Canada).

- Concern was expressed about the requirement of 50% of the members participating in a working group, especially if the number of members is expected to increase (New Zealand).

- A change in the text of the concept note was proposed regarding the denomination of the working group level from "scientific level" to "working level" in the diagram showing the structure of IBF (Canada).
- Clarifications were requested on the structure and functioning of the Secretariat (Argentina).
- It was proposed to have an informal tool for communication among participants such as a Facebook page where participants could interact and exchange messages (EC).
- It was proposed to constitute a sort of Executive Committee (composed of 3 countries max.) to coordinate the most practical aspects of the Forum (US).
- The importance of maintaining the flexible structure and to remain sharply focussed on a limited number of specific issues was underlined (Canada).

The chairs provided the following answers/ clarifications:

On the question of the involvement of international organisations, the EC chair answered that the plan for the future is to involve more international organisations in the activities of the Forum as members or observers. Also the countries attending the Forum can propose additional international organisations to be invited to the plenary and/or to the meetings of the working groups.

On the possibility of working groups to cooperate, the EC chair answered that the text of the concept note will be modified in order to introduce this possibility.

On the 50% threshold, The EC chair replied that if the number of members increases the requirement can be modified after discussion among the members. It was proposed to modify the text changing the requirement to "at least 4/5 members interested in cooperating on the subject proposed".

On the structure and functioning of the Secretariat, the EC chair explained that each participant should nominate a contact person for administrative and logistics tasks and that the so-formed network will constitute the Secretariat.

The EC also informed the participants that the WP 2018-2020 contains a Coordination and Support Action (CSA) to support the work of the IBF (deadline for applications is 13 February 2017).

On the suggestion of instituting an Executive committee, the EC chair replied that at the moment it would be preferable to consider the plenary as an executive committee given limited number of members. If in the future participation increases than the constitution of an executive body could be considered.

There was general agreement among the participants to keep the structure of the Forum flexible, to focus on a limited number of issues and to avoid duplication of activities.

Before closing the agenda point, the chair invited the participants to state if they wish to become members or observers of the International Bioeconomy Forum:

SCAR delegate: observer on behalf of EU Member States

South Korea: Observer

New Zealand: Member

South Africa: Member

India: Member

Argentina: Member

China: Member

Australia: Observer

Canada: Member

European Commission: Member

US: Member

FAO: Observer

BIOEAST initiative: Observer

4. Next steps and vision for the IBF.

Under this agenda point, each country was asked to give a brief presentation of the priorities related to the bioeconomy in their countries, the areas of interest for

cooperation, their vision for the evolution of the forum in the next years and possible linkages with other initiatives in their countries.

Argentina: *(see Power Point presentation)*

Australia: the Australian approach to funding international science and innovation collaboration is based on unilateral competitive granting programmes, determined by the priorities of individual institutions. The main mechanisms for supporting engagement in activities around the bioeconomy would be through existing institutional arrangements or through funding available under the Government's Global Innovation Strategy, in particular the Global Innovation Linkages programme and Global Connections Fund.

Canada: the strong drivers are the interest in improving alignment of research programmes; improving communication on research programmes of interest launched by other countries; and, understanding the synergies between the different departments and agencies in the different countries.

China: in China different ministries deal with the bioeconomy and launched programmes related to the bioeconomy (Industry, Science and Technology, Health, Environment, Agriculture). Environmental concern is raising as a central topic in the political and economic debate also in view of promoting economic activities such as tourism. The role that the bioeconomy can play in reaching environmental objectives is recognised. China is also very interested in applications of bioeconomy to agriculture, in particular the applications of microbiome to agriculture.

European Commission: underlined the importance of the role of horizontal and policy issues for the development of the bioeconomy and not only the scientific/technological issues such as the amount of biomass available at global level.

India: in India the importance of the bioeconomy is related to the role that it can play in reaching objectives such as food security, forest management, reduction of soil and water pollution and also it can contribute to job creation which is a political priority in India also due to the increasing population.

New Zealand: in New Zealand bioeconomy is mainly linked to food and fibre production. The New Zealand strategy is to use the bioeconomy to move away from the exclusive production of commodity products such as milk powder, frozen meat, and logs (which represent the major part of the economy but that are subject to price fluctuation that make New Zealand economy vulnerable) to value added products. The governmental direction has a strong focus on added value, climate change, the environment, the transition to a lower carbon economy and high value manufacturing.

A study on the impact of R&D investments on the bioeconomy showed that the annual rate of return was 17%¹ and a significant part of those advances were based on international connectedness. So participating in fora such as the IBF has significant advantages for New Zealand and other participating countries.

In New Zealand funding for research is based on science excellence and impact with the focus in contestable funds away from "business as usual" and more into "transformational ideas".

South Africa: has a bioeconomy strategy released 2013. It focuses on three pillars: agriculture, industry and environment. The agricultural focus is on innovation for food security, nutrition, security and sustainable increase of agricultural production.

One of the challenge for South Africa is on communicable diseases and development of vaccines and treatments.

In the industrial area bioeconomy is focussed on biobased materials, chemicals and bioenergy.

South Africa is updating a white paper on science and technology (to be released in a few months). This update will give more relevance to the role of digitisation, precision farming and the new industrial revolution.

South Africa underlined the importance of avoiding duplication of activities but also to connect researchers communities that are working on similar issues.

South Korea: bioeconomy is a priority for South Korea and they see added value from cooperation with other countries in international fora such the IBF

US: focus in the US is on smart agriculture, energy efficiency, a more efficient use of fertilisers, how to maintain quality of soil. A big challenge is how to model a system that

¹ <http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/research-policy/wp/2006/06-01>

includes energy, food, water and how to manage the amount of data that such an activity will involve.

Attention given to understanding the particularity of each ecosystem and region. This activity requires extensive monitoring and observation systems that are becoming more and more high-tech.

Member States delegate: the Member States delegate reminded the participants of the possibility for cooperation given by initiatives such the Joint Programming Initiatives and in particular he informed the participants of the upcoming ERANET Cofund coming up in 2019 on ICT in Agri-food systems.

5. Presentation of H2020 Societal Challenge 2 Work Programme 2018-20

Under this agenda point the European Commission gave a presentation of the activities funded under the Work programme 2018-2020 of societal challenge 2.

The presentation focussed in particular on those topics in which international participation would bring an added value.

(See presentation)

After the presentation the chair opened the floor for questions / clarifications:

- **Canada** asked clarification on the deadlines for applying to the calls 2018 and on the duration of the projects funded under these calls.

The EC speaker clarified the difference between one-stage and two-stage proposals. The first ones have only one submission deadline (13 February 2018). The proposal submitted must be already a complete proposal. Two-stage calls have instead two deadlines, consortia are required to submit a preliminary proposal, following a simplified template, within the first deadline (13 February 2018). If the proposal pass the first evaluation the consortia is required to submit a full proposal within a second deadline (11 September 2018).

Regarding the duration of the projects funded, the EC speaker, clarified that it is up to the consortia to indicate the duration of the project in the proposal.

6. Thematic Workshops

Under this agenda point the working groups on Microbiome and the one on ICT in Food systems reported on the outcome of the workshops held the previous day. Following the presentation the participants formalised their participation in each of the working groups.

New Zealand started with the presentation of the workshop on ICT in Food systems.

(see presentation on ICT in Food systems workshop)

After the presentation the chair opened the floor for questions / clarifications:

- **Australia** informed the participants that some parts of the Australian research community considered precision agriculture to be an area of competitive advantage rather than an area for collaboration with other countries. They would like to clarify that the purpose of the working group is to focus on enabling platforms for collaboration rather than discussing areas that would go to individual competitive advantage.

The New Zealand speaker replied that one solution to this is to focus the work on non-competitive areas (such as food safety in New Zealand) or pre-competitive areas where it is possible to share any kind of information. Another solution could be to focus on different parts of the value chain that are not competing with each other but they are simply parts of the same value chain.

One of these models could allow for cooperation without entering areas of competitive advantage.

The chair asked than the participants (members and observers) to state whether they would be interested in participating in the WG:

Argentina (member): yes (but need to identify a thematic officer).

Australia (observer): yes (but need to identify a thematic officer).

Canada (member): yes.

European Commission (member): yes.

China (member): need to consult on membership with the appropriate interlocutors.

India (member): need to consult on membership with the appropriate interlocutors.

New Zealand (member): yes.

South Africa (member): yes.

US (member): yes (but need to confirm after internal consultation).

SCAR representative (observer): yes, will participate through the ICT AGRI ERANET, will get back to the plenary if individual member states are interested in participating.

South Korea (observer): need to consult internally before taking a position on the participation in the WG.

After the consultation the European Commission presented the outcome of the preparatory workshop on Microbiome.

(see presentation on Microbiome workshops)

After the presentation the chair opened the floor for questions / clarifications:

- **Argentina** asked if it the possibility of promoting international consortium around microbiome interactions was considered. It is a quite critical issue since the whole humanity is depending on very few crops. The relation between Rhizobium and plants, for example, is one of the main factors to increase quickly the productivity of these plants. Through new instruments available for biotechnology (such as genetic) there is a way to modify this interaction in a positive way. This is critical for the development on new bio-fertilisers. The IBF could be a good instrument to promote for example a study on 5/6 Rhizobium-plant interactions. It will be also a good way to focus the work on a specific issue inside a domain like Microbiome that is, otherwise, to vast to tackle in a single working group.

The EC speaker agreed with the point made by Argentina and pointed out that there are already several groups working on the relation between Rhizobium and plants but the problem is that they work separately. The aim of the Microbiome WG should be to bring

together these groups. One of the common problems that these groups are facing is linked to data management and standardisation of data. So, this problem should be addressed first.

- **New Zealand** expressed concern on the fact that the scope of the group seems to be very ambitious and broad, the risk is to try to tackle too much. At present the research groups working on microbiome are working on silos (plant, soil, human, etc.). If you are working in one of these silos you are not going to be interested in the other ones, mainly because of where the funding comes from. So the real opportunity offered by the IBF Microbiome working group is to focus on how the soil microbiome affects the plant microbiome and how this affects the animal microbiome that in turn affects the human microbiome. It is something not very extensively studied because of the silos.

The EC speaker agreed with the comments made and took note of the suggestions.

- **Canada** acknowledged the problem of the breadth of the topic and stated that it was addressed during the workshop through the creation of a table of different possible activities for the working group. The table is going to be a template for the work that needs to be done.

- **Canada** asked about opportunities for funding on Microbiome in the next H2020 Work Programme.

The EC speaker informed the participants that there are around 9-10 topics dealing with the Microbiome in the next H2020 work programme (even if microbiome is not always mentioned in the title of the topic). One of the objectives of the CSA on Microbiome will be to connect the consortia that will be working on these topics and deal with some of the issues that were identified during the workshop such as data and regulations.

- **New Zealand** asked if antimicrobial resistance is in the scope of the discussion taking place in the working group.

The EC speaker confirmed that one of the topics of the next Work Programme is specifically dealing with alternatives to antimicrobials deriving from microbiome.

- **US** also worried by the breadth of the topic. US asked when there would be more information on the CSA for the Microbiome.

The EC speaker replied that the deadline for submission of proposals is 13 February 2018 and possibly the kick-off meeting will take place in September/October.

In the meantime, the EC speaker suggested to work together on a draft work plan and to finalise the matrix produced during the workshop.

After the discussion ended, the chair launched the round table consultation on the participation in the Microbiome Working Group:

US (member): yes

Canada (member): yes

European Commission (member): yes

Australia (observer): yes

China (member): yes

India (member): need to consult internally before taking a position on the participation in the WG.

New Zealand (member): need to consult internally before taking a position on the participation in the WG.

Argentina (member): yes

South Africa (member): yes

South Korea (observer): need to consult internally before taking a position on the participation in the WG.

SCAR representative (observer): need to consult with Member States to see which one would like to participate and also consult with the Commission to see what would be the best way to organise representation of the CSA in the working group.

To close the agenda point the chair declared officially established the two working groups based on the result of the consultations.

7. Presentation of new proposals for working groups

Natural Resource Canada delivered a Power Point presentation on Forest Bioeconomy in Canada and invited the participants to take part to an informal discussion on 1 December at the Canadian embassy to check their interest on a possible working group on forestry.

(see presentation)

FAO proposed the creation of a working group within the IBF to develop commonly agreed indicators. Such working Group would create a very good synergy with the work that FAO will undertake; it would both enrich and benefit from this work.

The proposal links to FAO's work on sustainability guidelines. And as part of this work, FAO will organise a technical meeting on bioeconomy indicators during the first quarter of 2018 to (i) take stock on where things stand; (ii) identify gaps and (iii), on that basis decide on how to move forward.

Argentina proposed a Working group on sustainable fisheries and the blue economy underlying the importance of the oceans as main source of proteins in the future. A written proposal for this working group will be submitted soon by Argentina.

Argentina proposed to promote an international workshop on the issue of socio-economic impacts of the bioeconomy. The EC chair suggested that a good venue for this could be the Global Bioeconomy Summit taking place in Berlin in April 2018.

Canada informed the participants that they are going to discuss with the US the possibility of co-leading a working group on Plant Health and after the discussion they are going to submit a written proposal on this working group (tentatively by the end of January).

The chair explained that proposals for new working groups, in order to be officially considered, will have to be submitted in writing in a 1-2 page document. The document should present the concept and objectives of the WG.

8. Presentation of global initiatives on the bioeconomy

Under this agenda point, two main events regarding the Bioeconomy were presented:

- The Global Bioeconomy Summit (Berlin, 19-20 April 2018). The German Bioeconomy Council, organising the Summit, decided to launch a competitive call for workshop proposals to take place during the summit. The deadline for submission is 15 December 2017.
- The Bioeconomy Investment Summit (Helsinki 14-15 December 2017).

(See presentations)

Regarding the Global Bioeconomy Summit, Argentina asked when the results of the evaluation of workshop proposals will be communicated.

The EC chair replied that the date was not known at the moment and promised that it will be communicated as soon it becomes available.

Concerning the Bioeconomy Investment Summit, US asked information on the profile of the people attending the event.

The representative of the European Forestry Institute replied that participants will be politicians, people from finance/banking investment sector, people from the industries and scientists and several other stakeholders.

9. Recap on actions and decisions and closing remarks

The chair expressed his satisfaction regarding the beginning of this new community and on the way the participants interacted over the day.

In addition a number of practical conclusions were mentioned:

- 1) Set up a network of "Sherpas" with one representative per participant that can act as first contact point for issues related to the Forum;
- 3) Update the governance document with the results of the discussion that took place during the meeting;
- 4) Build a calendar for 2018, with inputs from all the participants, with all the main events and actions that are taking place in each country and that are relevant to the activity of the Forum;
- 5) Further develop the procedure to propose new working groups (e.g. with the creation of templates) and draft templates for the reporting of each working group activities;
- 6) Organise activities such as workshops to promote dialogue on research aspects linked to the development of the bioeconomy that have not been investigated until now (such as social impacts of the bioeconomy);
- 7) Set up an informal interface for communication among the participants to the IBF (such as a Facebook page) and a collaborative platform to share documents (e.g. CIRCABC).

The next plenary meeting of IBF is tentatively scheduled to take place in Canada toward the end of summer 2018.