



Directorate F Bioeconomy

**INTERNATIONAL BIOECONOMY FORUM
(IBF)**

Concept Note

The purpose of this note is to set out a clear rationale for the IBF and proposes a light governance structure and basic working modalities that ensures impact, while preserving the informal character of this initiative.

1. BACKGROUND

The Commission adopted its Bioeconomy Strategy in March 2012. An important part of the strategy was to ensure that the importance of the bioeconomy¹ was raised at international level, in particular, and in line with the current 'Open to the world' priority, the opportunity to better structure international R&I cooperation to contribute to bioeconomy policy targets.

After the phasing out of the activities of the EU-US Task Force on Biotechnology Research and the KBBE Forum with Australia, Canada and New Zealand, it became important to fill this void by creating an international cooperation platform on the bioeconomy. Therefore, the multilateral network of the IBF was proposed to be kept as a main international cooperation priority/flagship for Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 2.

The need of an international cooperation network on the bioeconomy was also strongly supported at the Global Bioeconomy Summit, organised by Germany in Berlin in November 2015.

The general concept of the IBF is that of a co-owned platform, organised in ad-hoc working groups, to guide international cooperation on a limited number of R&I priorities and horizontal activities which are crucial for the development of a global, sustainable bioeconomy and addressing related global challenges (COP 21, SDGs, circular economy, sustainable food security, etc.).

2. RATIONALE FOR IBF

The role of the bioeconomy in achieving SDGs and COP21 and other important policy objectives such as food and nutrition security, rural development, job creation and decarbonisation of industries by switching to renewable raw materials has been recognised by almost all major countries, which have set up a bioeconomy strategy or incorporated the bioeconomy in their strategic development plans. Bioeconomy needs to be part of future-oriented public debates at international level in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge in the political and scientific community and to ensure a sustainable production and use of the biomass resources available at global level. Therefore there is a need for a space where regular and strategic international cooperation at multi-partner level can take place with a focus on building policy coherence and on exploiting synergies between countries and regions.

The development of the bioeconomy requires the performance of specific activities that can only be conducted at global level (such as the identification and mapping of the amount of biomass available at global level which constitutes an essential requirement for the bioeconomy to have an impact at market level or the development of common indicators and

definitions that would ease communications and increase collaboration between international partners).

Even though bodies with a similar structure as the one proposed in this document already exist (e.g. the Belmont Forum), they do not cover this kind of activities.

The aim of IBF is to provide a flexible multilateral instrument for international cooperation, specific to the bioeconomy, capable of adapting to emerging global needs and, therefore, to contribute to the achievement of global objectives which constitute political priorities for our DG.

The IBF's deliverables, in its first years, would be to:

- Coordinate, as appropriate, research funding programmes and focus the global effort on specific research areas of global interest, such as the microbiome, where mutual benefit could be obtained from better global cooperation and where studies and investments are expected to grow significantly in the next future.
- Identify emerging needs, issues and future research trends in order to anticipate the needs of society and of the market;
- Raise international awareness of the central role of bioeconomy, including bio industry, and bio products for reaching global policy targets (SDGs; COP21), also with the general public;
- Create a knowledge exchange on critical areas (e.g. outbreak of plant diseases affecting several regions and new areas due to climate change);
- Develop a policy dialogue, especially on bioeconomy indicators and on availability of biomass, essential for measuring progress of the bioeconomy at international level;
- Facilitate increased science and technology cooperation between members, at multilateral or bilateral levels, through various mechanisms including workshops, personnel exchanges, twinning of complementary projects and joint projects².

Following the first years of activities, an evaluation of the results achieved could be done and, based on the results, IBF members may decide to make any necessary changes to the activities and governance of the IBF.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

On 13 October 2016, Commissioner Moedas announced to set up and launch an International Bioeconomy Forum (IBF).

¹ In the context of this document bioeconomy should be understood as the production of renewable biological resources and the conversion of these resources and waste streams into value-added products, such as food, feed, bio-based products as well as bio-energy.

² The IBF members should be encouraged to use a wide range of cooperation mechanisms – not only large scale calls for proposals but also numerous other mechanisms that can be initiated and facilitated by the discussions and knowledge exchanges that will occur as a result of working group and plenary activities.

Representatives and funding agencies from **Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, India, New Zealand, South Africa and USA, international organisations (OECD, FAO, the European Forest Institute (EFI)), and JPI OCEAN, FACCE and HDHL** had joined an informal discussions on how to set up the IBF and started first activities on priority areas, demonstrating the huge interest to act at a global level. The EC received an official statement from Canada, India and South Africa to join the IBF, with the involvement of multiple government departments/funding agencies. Other countries (e.g. New Zealand and Argentina) also plan to issue similar statements. It is suggested that the involvement of the international organisations is further increased, e.g. by inviting UNIDO (UN Industrial Development Organisation) and EEA (European Environment Agency) etc.

As the IBF has been presented since the beginning as a co-owned platform, there is already a small number of R&I items of common interest which its members propose for scoping and cooperation.

Up to now, four working groups are under discussion:

- **'Food Systems Microbiomes and Beyond'** (EU lead on informal mapping and scoping)
- **'ICT in Precision Food Systems'** (New Zealand lead on informal scoping)
- **'Plant health'** (US lead on informal scoping)
- **'Forestry'** (expert discussion phase with participation of EU with the European Forest Institute, China, Canada, US – lead for scoping to be defined)
- Further working groups may be created in the future, depending on the IBF composition and declared interests.

4. THE WAY FORWARD

4.1 Basic governance structure and basic guidelines for the IBF

Although the IBF is conceived as an informal platform, and in order to avoid a proliferation of uncoordinated activities, it would be useful to define some governance principles and basic guidelines for procedures. The proposed governance structure in Annex 1 puts the plenary at the heart of all decision making, with the chair and secretariat (for the first three years to be held by the Commission) responsible for all administrative and coordination activities. It also sets basic guidelines and quality standards for any working groups to be set up.

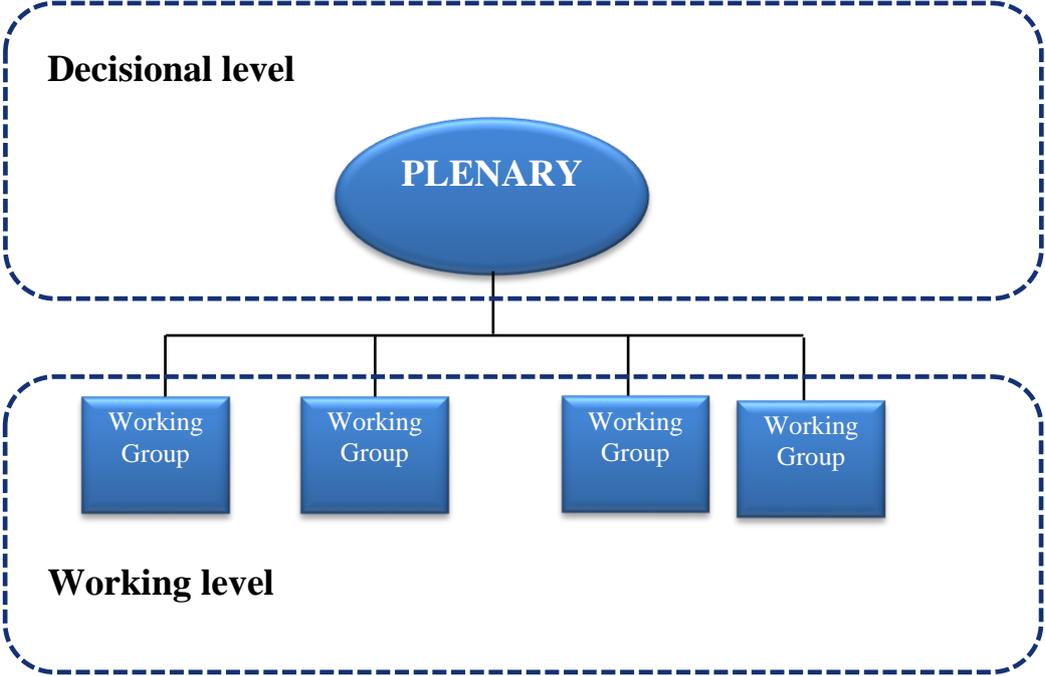
4.2 Organisation of first plenary meeting

The first plenary of IBF will be held 29-30 November 2017. It will be a two days event with a plenary meeting and official ceremony on one day and thematic workshops on the other day. The governance structure and the basic guidelines of IBF would be formally adopted during the plenary meeting with the IBF participants.

4.3 Cooperation mechanisms

IBF members will make use of a wide range of science and technology cooperation mechanisms, including but not limited to, the coordinate, as appropriate, of research funding programmes, Joint Programming Initiatives, ERA-Net Cofunds, workshops, personnel exchanges, twinning of complementary projects and joint projects.

ANNEX 1: Governance structure and guidelines for procedures



1. Members of the plenary

Members of the IBF sitting in the plenary would be organisations that are legally entitled to mobilize resources from national research funds and are engaged in activities that concern the bioeconomy (e.g. ministries for science and research, academy of sciences, scientific organisations and funding agencies). EU member states are represented by the European Commission that will report to them on the activities of the forum during the Programme Committee meetings and by a member of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) nominated for this purpose.

Members would commit to actively contribute to IBF initiatives in which they have interest (e.g.: provide venues for meetings, participate to the drafting of agendas and roadmaps, follow up invitations and participations to the events).

Initially, membership would be offered to the organisations of the countries that have cooperated with the European Commission to the development of the concept of IBF³ and it would be agreed during the first plenary meeting.

New members could be accepted, upon consensus approval of the existing members, at any moment of the year and start participating immediately in the activities of the Forum. Their membership could then be formalised during the next plenary meeting.

The member organizations would be represented by senior administrators or their properly mandated designees who can take executive decisions regarding the mobilization of resources to support IBF activities. During the meetings, each member could be assisted by experts. The costs related to the participation of these experts should be covered by the member.

³ Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, India, New Zealand, South Africa and USA.

Prior to becoming a Member, an organization can be invited (in agreement with all members) to participate as observer.

2. Working Groups

As already mentioned, the structure of IBF would be based on ad-hoc working groups focussing on specific subjects related to the bioeconomy. The activities would be organised on the basis of variable geometry, with participation based on specific interests (this applies also to the participation of the European Commission).

Participation in the working groups is open to any kind of expert regardless of their affiliation (public or private, governmental or academic, etc) provided that he/she has been nominated by one of the institutions sitting in the plenary.

The constitution of a new group could be proposed at any time of the year by a member of the plenary. The proposal should be submitted to the other members and observers in a 1-2 pager document describing the objectives and the expected output of the activity. The added value of tackling the specific challenge at international level would have to be clearly explained. The creation of a new working group would also require:

1. The identification of a leader for the working group⁴;
2. The approval of the members by consensus;
3. The participation in the working group of at least 4 members.

Additional guidelines to avoid the proliferation of working groups could be to fix a maximum duration of each working group and to limit the number of working groups that could exist at the same time.

The role of leader of a working group would come with the responsibility of coordinating the group's work (including administrative tasks) and that of arranging and hosting any workshop(s). At least one international Workshop per year should be organised by the leader organisation.

Each member of a working group would appoint a Theme Programme Officer who would provide overall responsibility for her/his organization's involvement in the working group, for the entire period of activity of the working group. The Theme Programme Officers will be entrusted by the Members to prepare, publish, and manage activities decided in the framework of the working group. The Theme Programme Officer of the leading organisation would be also responsible for reporting on the activities of the group during the plenary meeting.

The leader organisation would be responsible for the administrative work involved with the organisation of the workshops.

⁴ An observer can be a leader of a working group provided that the constitution of the working group has been supported by at least one member, that at least half of the members participates in it and that no member formally opposed to its constitution. By accepting to be a leader of a working group the observer accepts also all the commitments and obligations linked to this role.

Each Member will cover the travel and accommodation expenses of their representatives and experts who need to attend the workshops.

The leading organisation of the working group or other members may cover travel and accommodation expenses of external speakers and experts required at the meeting based on interest and budget availability.

Each member of a working group, through its Theme Programme Officer, should ensure that IBF initiatives are adequately communicated to their national science communities to ensure maximum participation.

The potential output of the Working Groups, in the first years of life of the Forum, would be:

- Coordinate and enhance synergies among Research working programmes in relation to the specific subject of the Working Group;
- Produce a roadmap of the activities planned highlighting the objectives and the expected impacts;
- Create an electronic arrangement (e.g. website) in which the results and development of activities related to the specific challenge could be shared and discussed by the scientific community;

If Working Groups sees a potential benefit from cooperation on specific topics, joint initiatives/activities can be organised. One of the leaders of the WGs involved has to take responsibility of reporting the outcome of these activities to the plenary.

After the first years and if the IBF would have proved itself to be a useful tool for the development of the bioeconomy, the level of ambition could be raised and IBF members may decide to make any necessary changes to the activities and governance of the IBF. Consequently, new tasks could be foreseen for the working groups.

3. Plenary meetings

A plenary meeting should be organised at least once a year. After the first plenary meeting the representatives of all the countries with which DG RTD has an S&T bilateral agreement could be invited as observers in order to raise awareness of the initiative and involve a maximum number of countries.

Members perform the following actions during the plenary meeting:

- a) Consider and adopt measures to establish, review, and update the policies and procedures of the IBF, as well as to evaluate its work and the accomplishment of its objectives, taking into account the current developments in international bioeconomy;
- b) Review periodically and approve the activities and agenda of the working groups;
- c) Provide recommendations regarding the areas in which investment should be focussed;
- d) Evaluate International Bioeconomy Forum activities and recommend improvements;

- e) Elect the co-chairs of the International Bioeconomy Forum
- f) Decide on the venue for the next annual plenary meeting, which shall be rotated among Members. In the first three years of life of the forum the European Commission offers to host the plenary meeting in its premises in Brussels. However, if a member country wishes to host an IBF plenary meeting before the end of this three years period, the proposal can be discussed with the other members.
- g) Establish ad hoc working groups as necessary;
- h) Perform other functions as necessary to achieve the International Bioeconomy Forum objectives.

To ensure the quality of discussions and the involvement of the International Bioeconomy Forum members, the presence of at least 2/3 of the members would constitute the quorum needed for an International Bioeconomy Forum plenary meeting to make joint decisions.

Observers are welcome at the plenary meetings, but do not count toward the quorum and they do not have right to take part of the decision making.

Decisions of the International Bioeconomy Forum are taken on a consensus basis.

For the first three years of life of the Forum, the European Commission is prepared to take responsibility for arranging and hosting the plenary meeting in Brussels and to cover the costs related to the reservation of the venue and the accommodation and travel costs of independent experts/speakers⁵ not employed by any of the Members. The Members would cover travel and accommodation costs for their staff attending the meeting and national experts.

3. Observers

Observers would be organizations that are active in the International Bioeconomy Forum remits, such as research organisations, international organisations (OECD, FAO, UNIDO, etc), EU Member States coordination bodies (relevant JPIs and ERANETs), extra European countries that are considering joining as members, higher or secondary education institutes, representatives of regions and cities and private or public research foundations.

They would be invited by the co-chairs, in agreement with the members of the Forum.

Observers can sit in the plenary provided no member object to their presence. They can take part to the discussion and they can decide to participate in working groups (in which case they accept the same commitments that members have to accept to participate in a working group). However, they shall not propose a new working group without the support of at least one member and they do not count toward the consensus⁶.

4. Co-Chairs

The International Bioeconomy Forum Members would elect 2 Co-Chairs for two-year terms.

⁵ Independent expert in this context is to be understood as a person with academic qualification and professional experience in the specific field under discussion and with no material current business relationship with any governmental institutions of the IBF members and observers countries.

⁶ Therefore decisions concerning the Forum can be taken without their approval.

One of the Co-Chairs is expected to represent a Member from a country not belonging to the EU. As an exception to this rule, for the first three years of life of the Forum (counting from the date of the first plenary), one of the co-Chair would be an high level official of the European Commission and for the first two years the second co-chair would be the representative of Canada⁷.

To ensure continuity, rotation of the International Bioeconomy Forum co-Chairs will be spaced by one year. A new elected Co-Chair will take office in January following his/her election.

The role and responsibility of the co-chairs would be:

- To prepare the agenda of the plenary meeting of the International Bioeconomy Forum in consultation with the members and assisted by the Secretariat, and to moderate and lead through the meetings' discussion from a neutral position with the objective to integrate different perspectives.
- To act as spokespersons of the International Bioeconomy Forum and to formally represent the Forum to external bodies, based on the positions agreed with the Members.
- To guarantee the continuous communication and information flows within the International Bioeconomy Forum, assisted by the Secretariat.

5. Secretariat

The Secretariat would be the primary administrative element of the International Bioeconomy Forum.

It would insure the links between co-Chairs, Members and the Working Groups and it would implement the decisions taken at the annual plenary meeting.

The Secretariat would be geographically distributed (Secretariat members can be located in the offices of any members' organizations) and it would be composed of at least one person from each Member organisation.

Each member/observer would designate a representative in his/her organisation to be part of the International Bioeconomy Forum secretariat, to ensure regular follow-up of commitments taken and to participate in possible working groups or task teams run by the secretariat.

The Secretariat would interact through electronic communication means. In addition a dedicated space (with password for IBF members) would be used for hosting and sharing internally all information, under the responsibility of the Secretariat.

⁷ This decision has been taken on the basis that Canada has been the only country that offered to co-chair the Forum in its starting phase following the distribution of the first draft of this note