

Brief record of the 31st Meeting of GEAC held on 31.12.2001

The 31st meeting of the GEAC was held on **31.12.2001** at 11.00 a.m. Under the chairmanship of Dr. Sushil Kumar, Co- chairman, GEAC, as Shri A.M.Gokhale, Additional Secretary and Chairman GEAC, had to attend on a short notice an urgent meeting called by the Cabinet Secretariat. A list of participants is annexed.

Only one item pertaining to clearing of held up Soya oil consignment was considered in the meeting. To briefly recall, a meeting of GEAC was convened on 7.9.2001 to consider requests received from two voluntary organizations, namely, Catholic Relief Services and CARE India regarding clearing of consignment of Soya oil imported from USA through USAID. This Soya oil has been produced from Soya bean, both unmodified and genetically modified, grown in the US. These consignments have been held up at Kolkata Port, and these organizations are incurring heavy demurrage on these consignments. As was decided in this meeting, the GEAC directed the two organizations- CARE and CRS- to have the Soya oil samples tested for DNA and protein through Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics (CDFD). The Director, CDFD has submitted the report indicating the absence of DNA and proteins in the soya oil samples. Thereafter, the report of CDFD was circulated to the GEAC members requesting for their comments. The Co-Chairman, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Central Pollution Control Board and Ministry of External Affairs, DBT have agreed to clear the proposal.

The Department of Food processing Industries opined if CDFD is a recognized and accredited food testing laboratory for analysis of GM food products, then their test results may be given due weight by the GEAC unless there are strong reasons to the contrary. They have further cautioned that if these consignments are cleared, products extracted or derived from GM material (not necessarily containing DNA and protein) will have to be allowed for import in the country in future also. The future implication of the decision on this matter therefore needs serious consideration.

The members discussed at length the various aspects of the matter including the apprehensions expressed by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries. The members emphatically stated that right from the beginning the GEAC had decided to consider this matter as a special case, not to be taken as a

precedent either by CRS and CARE, or by any other organization. After careful deliberations, the following decisions were taken:

- The consignments comprising of approx. 300MT of Refined Vegetable Soybean oil imported by CARE India and approx. 1000MT of Refined Vegetable Soybean oil imported by CRS, which have been held up at Kolkata Port may be cleared, since the samples from these consignments tested negative for the presence of DNA and protein. This clearance is only for these consignments and should not be taken as precedent in future. As provided by in the Rule 11 of the “Rules for Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of hazardous microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells 1989”, anybody intending to produce, sell, import or use food stuffs, ingredients in food stuffs and additives containing genetically engineered organisms will have to seek the approval of GEAC, as per the procedures.
- The members agreed that the term ‘genetically engineered’ should be used, and not ‘genetically modified’. In the 1989 Rules, as well as in the name of the Committee (GEAC), the term ‘genetically engineered’ is used.
- The Chairman will write to all the members inviting their suggestion about the kind of system that is required for monitoring of genetically engineered organisms/products from research to use in the country.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks from the Chair.

List of participants who attended 31st meeting of GEAC on 13.12.2001

1. Shri Sushil Kumar
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2. Dr. P.K. Ghosh
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New Delhi – 110 003
3. Dr. O.P. Agarwal
Joint Adviser, RPBD
Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
Anusandhan Bhawan, 2, Rafi Marg
New Delhi – 110 001
4. Shri S.K. Mahajan
Head,
Molecular Biology & Agricultural Division
Bhabha Atomic Research Centre
Bombay – 400 085
5. Shri Surendra Singh
Assistant Director
Ministry of Food Processing Industries
Panchsheel Bhawan,
New Delhi
6. Shri R.P. Sharma
Biotechnology Centre
Indian Agricultural Research Institute
New Delhi – 110 012
7. Dr. A.K. Bhatnagar
Botany Department
Delhi University
Delhi – 110 007

8. Dr. M. Sundaravodivel
Central Pollution Control Board,
New Delhi
9. Dr. G.V. Sarat Babu
Additional Director
Ministry of Environment & Forests,
New Delhi
10. Dr. Sujata Arora
Joint Director
Ministry of Environment & Forests, New Delhi
11. Ms. Madhu Gupta
Research Assistant, Ministry of Environment & Forests,
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