

Decisions taken in the 99th Meeting of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) held on 17.2.2010.

The 99th meeting of the GEAC was held on 17.2.2010 in the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) under the chairmanship of Shri M. F. Farooqui Additional Secretary, MoEF and Chairman, GEAC.

The deliberations/decisions taken in the GEAC meeting in respect of Agenda Items 3 to 5 are as follows:

Agenda item No. 3: Action taken report on the decision taken in the 98th GEAC meeting.

3.1 The Member Secretary, GEAC informed the Committee that decisions taken in the meeting held on 13.5.2009 have been communicated to the project proponents, concerned government departments and other agencies. Details of action taken were placed before the members and the following points were noted by the Committee:

3.2 It was noted that the meeting of the sub-committee under the chairmanship of Shri A K Goyal, Joint Secretary, MoEF to examine the feasibility of creating a separate account for utilization of funds collected as processing fee for meeting the expenses incurred in giving the approvals, monitoring, etc under Rules 1989 was held on 18.1.2010. Further follow-up action on this would be taken.

3.3 During the discussions, Dr P M Bhargava, pointed out that a brainstorming session to discuss the performance of Bt cotton was to be organized by ICAR. However, this has not happened till date. It was informed that the above proposal was deferred in view of Bt brinjal consultations during January-February 2010. The Ministry agreed to send a reminder to ICAR.

3.4 On the draft proposal for setting up a "National Centre for Assessment of GMOs" prepared by Dr. P. M. Bhargava, the Member Secretary, GEAC informed that the Hon'ble Supreme Court in WP (Civil) 260/2005 had directed the UOI to submit its response. The response prepared in consultations with several institutes involved in GMO research, development and testing has been submitted to the Hon'ble Supreme Court. After a brief discussion on the matter, it was agreed that the proposal received from Dr Bhargava and comments received from various institutions would be circulated to all members for their comments. It was further decided to consider the matter in the next GEAC meeting.

Agenda item No. 4 : Policy issues

4.1 Discussions on the follow up actions issues arising from the decision on commercialization of Bt brinjal event EE-I taken by the Ministry of Environment and Forests

4.1.1 The Committee noted that the Hon'ble Minister for Environment and Forests while taking a decision to impose moratorium on Bt brinjal on 9.2.2010 has directed several follow up actions as given under:

1. Further studies and tests with appropriate protocols in appropriate laboratories.

2. Review of all materials received by the Minister as part of the consultation process.
3. Interact with all those scientists, institutions and civil society groups who have submitted written representation to the Minister.
4. Consult with scientists like Prof M S Swaminathan, Dr P M Bhargava, Dr G Padmanabhan, Dr M Viyayan, Dr Keshav Kranthi and Dr Madhav Gadgil and others to draw up fresh protocols for specific tests that will have to be conducted to generate public confidence.

4.1.2 The Chairman GEAC invited all members to give their views on the matter. The Committee briefly discussed the complexity of integrating scientific issues and public perception in the decision making process. The Committee opined that public awareness and education should be initiated in the early stages of product development for which an organized outreach strategy should be put in place.

4.1.4 Joint Secretary (Seeds) on behalf of Department of Agriculture & Cooperation in the context of the current status of release of Bt Brinjal opined that seeds would certainly be required for further testing and therefore the confiscation and destruction of Bt Brinjal seed is likely to interfere with the implementation of the order dated 09.02.10. The representative of MOA also sought clarifications on the process to be followed by the GEAC in implementing the order dated 9.2.2010, the protocols and procedures to be followed for other GM crops, the current status of GEAC as role clarity is absolutely necessary since the GEAC is presently responsible for approval of GM products. She further opined that the Government needs to provide an assurance of a transparent and predictable approval regime to encourage R&D of GM crops in the public sector and enhance investments from private sector as public sector alone cannot provide the required inputs for increasing agricultural productivity.

4.1.5 The Chairman, GEAC clarified that there is no change in the mandate of the GEAC even if the name of GEAC is changed to Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee. GEAC would continue to be the apex body having a mandate to accord approval of activities involving (i) large scale use of GMOS in research and (ii) environmental release of GMOs including experimental field trials. He further clarified that the present decision imposing a moratorium is only for Bt brinjal Event EE-I.

4.1.6 After a brief discussion on the matter, the members opined that more time is required to go through the decision document of 9.2.2010 and Annexures before deciding on the future course of action. The Committee requested Member Secretary GEAC to prepare a matrix on issues arising from the consultations along with names of people/organizations that have submitted written comments to the Minister. It was agreed that a hard copy of the Annexures would be circulated to all members of the GEAC.

4.1.7 Subsequent to the moratorium on Bt brinjal, the Ministry has received a letter from representatives of many civil society groups requesting the GEAC to immediately:

- take stock of how much seed was produced, on how many acres, what happened to the same, confiscate all such seed stock and planting material immediately and destroy the same in the presence of an independent observer.
- to notify a liability clause on the crop developer that it will be solely liable (penalty, redressal and remediation clauses to be part of this) for any leakage or contamination that could happen during the moratorium period.

- not to allow open air trials during the moratorium period.

4.1.8 The Committee after detailed deliberations concluded that moratorium has not been imposed on conduct of additional studies which would require seeds/ plant materials. It was therefore decided that directions for destruction of seeds cannot be issued at this stage. However, it was agreed that information on seed production, availability, etc, would be obtained from the proponents (M/s Mahyco, TNAU, Coimbatore and UAS Dharwad) and NBPGR may be requested to store the seed stock until a decision on the need and type of additional studies is taken. The Committee requested the Chairman, GEAC to take up the matter with Director NBPGR/ DG-ICAR.

Agenda Item No 5: Any other matter with the permission of the Chair.

None

The next meeting of the GEAC is scheduled for 28.4.2010.

List of the members who attended the 99th GEAC meeting held on 17.2.2010

S.No	Name and address
1.	Shri M.F. Farooqui, Additional Secretary, MoEF and Chairman, GEAC.
2.	Dr. Arjula R. Reddy, Ex. VC, Yogi Vemana University & Co-Chairman, GEAC.
3.	Shri A.K. Goyal, Joint Secretary, MoEF and Vice Chairman, GEAC.
4.	Dr Vasantha Muthuswamy, former Chief (BMS) ICMR.
5.	Ms Upma Chawdhry, Joint Secretary (Seeds), MOA
6.	Dr V S Chauhan, Director, ICGEB, New Delhi
7.	Dr S K Apte, Associate Prof, BARC, Mumbai
8.	Dr. B. M. Khadi, Principal Scientist & Head, RS, UAS, Dharwad.
9.	Dr. P. Ananda Kumar , Project Director, NRCPB, IARI, New Delhi
10.	Dr. Ramesh Sonti, Scientist, CCMB, Hyderabad
11.	Dr. Govindraj Hegde, Assistant Professor, National Law School, Bangalore.
12.	Dr. N. Manickam, Scientist, Environmental Biotechnology, ITRC, Lucknow.
13.	Dr. P.S Chandurkar, Plant Protection Adviser, Plant Quarantine and Storage, Faridabad.
14.	Prof Inderjit Singh, Centre for Environmental Management, New Delhi
15.	Shri S. K. Jain, Industrial Advisor, Ministry of Industry, New Delhi.
16.	Shri. Sudhir Garg, Director of Export Promotion, Department of Commerce & Industry, New Delhi
17.	Shri D. S. Mishra, Assistant Commissioner (Seeds), Ministry of Agriculture, New Delhi
18.	Dr. R. Warriar, Director, MoEF & Member Secretary, GEAC, New Delhi
19.	Ms. Madhu Gupta, Research Officer, MoEF, New Delhi
Special Invitee	
20.	Dr. P. M. Bhargava,