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منظمة  
الأغذية والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

# COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

## Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda

### Twentieth Regular Session

Rome, 24–28 March 2025

## OPTIONS FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. In agreeing on the Strategic Plan for the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (2023–2031), the Commission, at its last session, requested the Secretariat to propose options for a procedure for the ad hoc identification of new and emerging issues for inclusion in the Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW).<sup>1</sup>

2. This document provides some background to the Commission’s request, explores existing procedures and, taking into account comments and inputs received from the Commission’s intergovernmental technical working groups (Working Groups),<sup>2</sup> discusses a possible new procedure through which new and emerging issues could potentially be identified ad hoc for consideration by the Commission.

## II. CURRENT PROCEDURES FOR BRINGING NEW ISSUES TO THE ATTENTION OF THE COMMISSION

3. According to the Commission’s existing rules, Members may, at various junctures, bring new items to the attention of the Commission for its consideration. These items may be proposed: (i) for inclusion in the MYPOW; (ii) for inclusion in the provisional agenda prior to a session of the Commission; or (iii) for addition to the agenda during a session of the Commission.

### (i) *Adding major outputs/milestones to the MYPOW*

4. Since 2007, the MYPOW has guided the substantive work of the Commission.<sup>3</sup> In 2013, the Commission adopted the Strategic Plan 2014–2023, which, in addition to updating the MYPOW, specified the vision, mission and goals of the Commission. It also provided guidance with regard to the implementation, monitoring and review of the MYPOW.<sup>4</sup> In 2017 and 2019, the Commission overhauled the Strategic Plan, redefined its goals in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and identified five operative principles. The Strategic Plan 2019–2027 also identified activities to be undertaken in preparation for the Commission’s Eighteenth and Nineteenth Regular Sessions.<sup>5</sup> In 2023, the Commission reviewed progress made since its Sixteenth Regular Session and agreed on the Strategic Plan 2023–2031.<sup>6</sup>

5. Throughout these years, the MYPOW has continued to be the main tool through which the Commission has planned its future work and scheduled the delivery of its outputs and milestones.

6. The Strategic Plan 2023–2031 takes into account the Commission’s Framework for Action on Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture<sup>7</sup> as well as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.<sup>8</sup> Like its predecessors, it foresees progress reports as well as reviews of the major outputs and milestones of the MYPOW for every other session of the Commission. Thus, the Strategic Plan provides the opportunity to add new issues for inclusion in the MYPOW even though only every four years. Against this background, the Commission formulated its request to explore options for a procedure for the ad hoc identification of new and emerging issues, i.e. a procedure that would allow the Commission to identify and consider new and emerging issues without having to wait for a session at which a review and update of the MYPOW is foreseen.

7. Only on rare occasions has the Commission amended its MYPOW outside the usual four-year review cycle under which it has the opportunity to schedule the consideration of new and emerging issues for the following session or the session thereafter. Examples include the Commission’s Fourteenth Regular Session, at which it adopted a separate Programme of Work on Climate Change

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<sup>1</sup> CGRFA-19/23/Report, paragraph 125.

<sup>2</sup> CGRFA-20/25/6.1; CGRFA-20/25/7.1; CGRFA-20/25/8.1; CGRFA-20/25/9.1.

<sup>3</sup> CGRFA-11/07/Report, *Appendix E*.

<sup>4</sup> CGRFA-14/13/Report, *Appendix I*.

<sup>5</sup> CGRFA-17/19/Report, *Appendix F*.

<sup>6</sup> CGRFA-19/23/Report, *Appendix E*.

<sup>7</sup> FAO. 2022. *Framework for Action on Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture*. FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8338en>

<sup>8</sup> CBD/COP/DEC/15/4.

and Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (2013–2017)<sup>9</sup> and in addition amended the MYPOW, although no review of its work programme was foreseen for that session. Similarly, eight years later, at its Eighteenth Regular Session, the Commission again adopted changes to the MYPOW outside the four-year review cycle. This time, the Commission amended the MYPOW to integrate the climate change work programme.<sup>10</sup>

8. While changing the review cycle to allow for a review of the MYPOW at *every* session of the Commission could be considered an obvious solution, it would defeat the purpose of the MYPOW as a planning tool intended to give Commission Members and the Secretariat a minimum of medium-term planning certainty.

***(ii) Adding new and emerging issues to the provisional agenda prior to Commission sessions***

9. According to the Commission’s Rules of Procedure, any Member of the Commission may request the Director-General “normally not less than 30 days before the date fixed for the opening of a session, to include an item in the provisional agenda.”<sup>11</sup> The Director-General shall thereupon circulate the proposed item to all Members of the Commission, together with any “necessary documents”. In adopting the agenda of the session, the Commission may decide whether the proposed additional agenda item should be considered.

10. With this rule, the Commission’s Rules of Procedure provide a mechanism for the ad hoc identification and consideration of new and emerging issues. However, while the Director-General should circulate the “necessary documents” prior to the session, it is likely that documentation on issues whose inclusion in the provisional agenda has been requested towards the end of the allowable timeframe will not be comprehensive and not be available in all languages. If it is agreed to consider a new and emerging issue that has been put on the provisional agenda at short notice, it may often be difficult, if not impossible, for the Secretariat to provide the Commission with the background information necessary to allow it to consider the item in its full breadth and with all its implications.

***(iii) Adding new and emerging issues to the agenda during a session***

11. Similar or even more severe difficulties may arise when a new and emerging issue is spontaneously added to the agenda during a session of the Commission, whether at the time the agenda is adopted or at a later point during the session. The Commission’s Rules of Procedure explicitly address the latter case and provide that “[a]fter the agenda has been adopted, the Commission may, by consensus, amend the agenda by the deletion, addition or modification of any item.”<sup>12</sup> In such cases where a new item is added to the agenda, it may be impossible to provide relevant documentation.

### **III. OPTIONS FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES**

12. Given the shortcomings of the existing procedures, the Commission may wish to consider introducing a procedure that, on the one hand, will allow Members to propose at relatively short notice that the Commission consider an unscheduled issue and, on the other hand, will ensure that there is sufficient time to prepare the necessary documentation and facilitate in-depth consideration of the issue by the Commission.

13. Such a procedure could allow the Commission to react in a timely manner to new scientific, technological or policy developments and, moreover, allow the Secretariat to prepare relevant documentation in time for the Commission to review and deliberate upon it. It could encourage Commission Members to contribute more actively to the Commission’s work, including during the intersessional periods. On the other hand, it could also lead to an inflation of proposals and, as noted by the Working Group on Animal Genetic Resources,<sup>13</sup> potentially overburden Commission Members

<sup>9</sup> CGRFA-14/13/Report, *Appendix D*.

<sup>10</sup> CGRFA-18/21/Report, *Appendix B*.

<sup>11</sup> Rules of Procedure, Rule VI.2.

<sup>12</sup> Rules of Procedure, Rule VI.3.

<sup>13</sup> CGRFA-20/25/7.1, paragraph 32.

and the Secretariat alike. To avoid such an inflation of proposals and to secure a substantive screening of proposals, the Commission may wish to set criteria for the consideration of new and emerging issues and, as appropriate, involve its subsidiary bodies in the review of proposals prior to a decision being taken on their inclusion in the provisional agenda for a regular session.

14. Drawing on comparable procedures in other fora,<sup>14</sup> a possible procedure, with various options, is discussed below and summarized in the *Appendix* to this document, for consideration by the Commission.

#### *Gathering proposals for new and emerging issues*

15. The new procedure could allow Commission Members and observers to submit, by a certain deadline following the end of the previous session of the Commission, proposals for new and emerging issues to be considered by the Commission at its next session. The length of such a period would of necessity depend on the nature (and hence the duration) of any consultative and decision-making procedure decided upon. It might have to be relatively short (e.g. 12 months), for example if it were decided that the subsidiary bodies of the Commission should be consulted on the proposals, or to be relatively long (e.g. 16 months), for example if it were decided that only the Bureau should be consulted. The Working Group on Animal Genetic Resources, at its last session, recommended the involvement of the Commission's Working Groups, "taking into account the need to limit the quantity of new and emerging issues, in order to avoid overburdening of Commission Members."<sup>15</sup>

#### *Proposals for new and emerging issues*

16. To facilitate the review of proposals and support possible consideration and decision-making by the Commission, the procedure could identify minimum information requirements that proposals for new and emerging issues would have to meet, for example, information on:

- (i) why the issue requires urgent attention by the Commission;
- (ii) how the issue relates to the Commission's mandate as defined in its Terms of Reference<sup>16</sup> and Goals;<sup>17</sup>
- (iii) the sectoral or cross-sectoral workstream under which the issue should be discussed, as applicable;
- (iv) work already being undertaken on the issue in other fora; and
- (v) relevant sources of information on the issue.

#### *Review of proposals*

17. The new procedure could provide for a review of the proposals by the Commission's subsidiary bodies, as appropriate. The procedure could further provide criteria that the Director-General, in consultation with the Bureau, would be invited to take into account when deciding on whether to include a proposed issue in the provisional agenda in line with Rule VI.1 of the Rules of Procedure.

18. It should be noted that, even if a proposed new issue is not included in the provisional agenda of the next session of the Commission, any Member of the Commission could still request, in line with Rule VI.2 of the Rules of Procedure, the inclusion of the issue in the provisional agenda. In such a case, the proposed item would have to be circulated to all Members of the Commission, together with any necessary documents. In other words, the new procedure would not replace existing procedures, unless the Commission were to decide otherwise and amend the Rules of Procedure accordingly.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Criteria for the review of proposals*

19. Criteria that may be taken into account when identifying new and emerging issues for inclusion in the provisional agenda could include:

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, UNEP/CBD/COP/DEC/IX/29.

<sup>15</sup> CGRFA-20/25/7.1, paragraph 32.

<sup>16</sup> See Statutes of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Section 2.

<sup>17</sup> Strategic Plan for the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (2023–2031), p.1.

<sup>18</sup> For amendments to the Rules of Procedure, see Rule XIV.

- (i) relevance of the issue to the Commission's Terms of Reference and Goals;<sup>19</sup>
- (ii) evidence of potential unexpected and significant impact of the issue on genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture;
- (iii) urgency of addressing the issue/imminence of the issue with respect to the Goals of the Commission as well as the magnitude of the actual or potential impact on genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture;
- (iv) geographic coverage and potential spread, including rate of spread, of the issue relating to the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture;
- (v) impact of the issue on the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture;
- (vi) evidence of the absence or limited availability of tools for limiting or mitigating the negative impact of the issue on the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture;
- (vii) magnitude of the actual and potential impact of the issue on human well-being;
- (viii) magnitude of the actual and potential impact of the issue on productive sectors and economic well-being as related to the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture.

*Final decision on new and emerging issues*

20. The final decision on the inclusion of a new issue in the agenda of a session and, if appropriate, its addition to the Commission's work programme would ultimately lie with the Commission when adopting the agenda and revising the MYPOW, respectively.

#### **IV. GUIDANCE SOUGHT**

21. The Commission may wish to review and, as appropriate, revise the procedure for the identification of new and emerging issues, as given in the *Appendix* to this document.

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<sup>19</sup> See *Statutes of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* and *Strategic Plan for the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture 2023–2031*.

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**APPENDIX****PROCEDURE FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES FOR  
CONSIDERATION BY THE COMMISSION**

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1. Any Member or observer of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture may propose within a period of [12] [16] months following the last day of the preceding regular session of the Commission that the Commission consider a new and emerging issue at its following session. The Secretariat will remind Members and observers of the deadline for the submission of proposals three months prior to the expiry of the deadline. Proposals should be sent by e-mail to the Commission Secretariat ([cgrfa@fao.org](mailto:cgrfa@fao.org)).
2. The proposal should be accompanied by information on:
  - (i) why the issue requires urgent attention by the Commission;
  - (ii) how the issue relates to the Commission's mandate as defined its Terms of Reference<sup>20</sup> and Goals;<sup>21</sup>
  - (iii) the sectoral or cross-sectoral workstream under which the issue should be discussed, as applicable;
  - (iv) work already being undertaken on the issue in other fora; and
  - (v) relevant sources of information on the issue.
3. The Secretariat will make proposals for new and emerging issues available to the [relevant subsidiary bodies] [and] [or] the Bureau of the Commission, [as appropriate,] for their review, along with additional relevant information that is available to the Secretariat at the time.
4. In line with Rule VI.1 of the Rules of Procedure, the Director-General is invited to decide, in consultation with the Bureau, if and how the proposed issue(s) will be included in the provisional agenda for the next session of the Commission, taking into account the following criteria:
  - (i) relevance of the issue to the Commission's Terms of Reference and Goals;
  - (ii) evidence of potential unexpected and significant impact of the issue on genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture;
  - (iii) urgency of addressing the issue/imminence of the issue with respect to the Goals of the Commission as well as the magnitude of actual or potential impact on genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture;
  - (iv) geographic coverage and potential spread, including rate of spread, of the issue relating to the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture;
  - (v) impact of the issue on the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture
  - (vi) evidence of the absence or limited availability of tools for limiting or mitigating the negative impact of the issue on the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture, if applicable;
  - (vii) magnitude of the actual and potential impact of the issue on human well-being;
  - (viii) magnitude of the actual and potential impact of the issue on productive sectors and economic well-being as related to the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources/biodiversity for food and agriculture.
5. The Secretariat will prepare and circulate documentation on the proposed new and emerging issue(s), if included in the provisional agenda, in line with Rule VI of the Rules of Procedure. The documentation may include a proposal for the revision of the Commission's Multi-Year Programme of Work to reflect the new and emerging issues.

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<sup>20</sup> See *Statutes of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, Section 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Strategic Plan for the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (2023–2031)*, p.1.