

Alliance Council Meeting

Ministero Delle Politiche Agricole, Alimentari e Forestali, Rome, Italy

Saturday 25 June 2011

Meeting Report

OVERVIEW

The inaugural Alliance Council meeting took place on Saturday 25 June 2011 in Rome following the signing of the Charter at the Ministerial Summit on Friday 24 June. The meeting was chaired by New Zealand (Hon Tim Groser, Minister Responsible for International Climate Change Negotiations). Secretariat support was provided by Hayden Montgomery and Laura Hogg.

This report is a summary of the key discussions and outcomes from the meeting.

PARTICIPANTS

Twenty nine countries were present at the Council meeting, represented by over 45 people: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, UK, USA, Uruguay, Vietnam. Refer to Appendix One for a full participants' list.

MEETING OUTCOMES

The Council meeting achieved the following outcomes:

- Confirmation that New Zealand will be Chair of the Council and Canada its Vice Chair for the next twelve months. Canada will host the next Council meeting (likely to be mid-2012), at which point it will become Alliance Council Chair.
- Confirmation that New Zealand will continue to host the Secretariat.
- Confirmation of the Chairs/Co-Chairs of the Research and Cross-cutting Groups, as per current arrangements (refer paragraph 5 for details).
- Agreement to an initial list of organisations to be approached as Alliance Partners and a process for approaching them (refer paragraphs 14-15 for details).

- A full read through of the second draft of the Communication Policy and agreement to proceed to a third draft, based on discussions at the meeting (refer paragraphs 19-22 for details). The Secretariat will circulate this to countries on Wednesday 29 June 2011.
- Identification of key milestones and activities for the Alliance in the next 12 months (refer paragraphs 23-30 for details).

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

OPENING REMARKS

1. The Chair welcomed the Alliance Council to its first meeting, congratulating countries on the successful Ministerial Summit and Charter signing the day before. Thai officials were welcomed to the meeting in an observer capacity, their interim government having prevented them from signing the Charter at the Summit. Thailand's Alliance membership will be reconfirmed once its government is constituted.

2. Before turning to the meeting agenda, the floor was handed to Antonello Colosimo, Chief of Staff in the Cabinet of the Italian Agriculture Minister Francesco Saverio Romano, to welcome delegates to the Ministry buildings and the first Council meeting. Colosimo spoke of Italy's pride in becoming an Alliance membership. Food security and climate change are amongst the greatest challenges of the new millennium. To respond to them, we must use the most efficient and effective instruments, uniting countries around the world. The Alliance is indeed such an instrument and therefore has a core contribution to make – helping create sustainable and productive agri-food systems, supported by innovative research, in an increasingly resource-constrained world.

CONFIRMATION OF VICE CHAIR

3. Following the offer expressed on 17 June 2011, the Council confirmed Canada as the host of the next Council meeting (2012). Jamshed Merchant, Assistant Deputy Minister at Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada was welcomed as the Council's Vice Chair. The Council also noted the UK's offer to host a future meeting of the Council.

CONFIRMATION OF THE MEMBER HOSTING THE SECRETARIAT

4. The Council confirmed New Zealand as the host country of the Alliance Secretariat, noting the intent in the Charter that this hosting responsibility be periodically reviewed.

CONFIRMATION OF RESEARCH GROUP AND CROSS-CUTTING GROUP CHAIRS

5. The Council confirmed the Chairs of the Research and Cross-Cutting Groups as follows:
- **Croplands Research Group:** chaired by the **US** (Steve Shafer, US Department of Agriculture)
 - **Livestock Research Group:** co-chaired by the **Netherlands** (Martin Scholten, Wageningen University) and **New Zealand** (Harry Clark, NZ Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Research Centre)
 - **Paddy Rice Research Group:** co-chaired by **Japan** (Kaz Yagi, National Institute for Agro-Environmental Sciences) and **Uruguay** (Alvaro Roel, INIA)

- **Soil Carbon & Nitrogen Cycling Cross-Cutting Group:** co-chaired by **Australia** (Bill Slattery, Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) and **France** (Jean-Francois Soussana, INRA)
- **Inventory/Measurement Issues Cross-Cutting Group:** co-chaired by **Canada** (Ian Campbell, Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada) and **the Netherlands** (Imke de Boer, Wageningen University)

RESEARCH GROUP ACTIVITY UPDATE

6. The Research and Cross-Cutting Group chairs were invited to make any comments or observations about their activities, following on from their presentation to the Ministerial Summit (refer separate PDF). Note that the **Livestock Group** co-chair was unable to attend the Council meeting.

7. The US circulated a handout (refer separate PDF) on the work of the **Croplands Group** and elaborated on some of the short term actions of the Group. Special mention was made of the role of Kansas State University, which is going to host an online database of relevant research for the Croplands Group. The US noted it is the only Group not to have a co-chair and welcomed other countries to consider joining it in this role. The relevance of work underway in the World Agro-Forestry Centre to the Croplands Group was noted and the Group was encouraged to actively connect to this organisation.

8. Japan elaborated on the action plan for the **Paddy Rice Group**, noting the smallness of the Group and its desires to see an increased membership.

9. The Netherlands and Canada outlined their intentions for the **Inventory & Measurement (I/M) Cross-Cutting Group**. Now that the work of the Research Groups is getting underway, the I/M Group will begin to identify how it can best help the groups coordinate their efforts on inventory and measurement issues. A workshop is planned for mid-November 2011 in Canada. The potential for duplication and overlap of the Cross-Cutting Groups with the work of the Research Groups was noted.

10. Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) was raised as a possible area of work for the I/M Group (in Versailles it was floated as a possible new Group) but this met with concern from some countries. Some commented that LCA has trade and policy dimensions that are not part of the Alliance's research mandate. As well, LCA is broader in scope than just agricultural greenhouse gas emissions (e.g. also includes transport, energy, waste, etc). LCA in other international forums was noted, e.g. ISO.

11. France (endorsed by Australia) outlined the focus of the **Soil Carbon & Nitrogen Cycling Cross-Cutting Group** – improving methodologies and models for soil mitigation across the three Research Groups. A first workshop had been held in March (Orleans) where a collective interest in building a common modelling platform was identified. A second workshop was planned for July 2011 in Leuven, Belgium that would look at model-data inter-comparison, including hands-on training. Council representatives were encouraged to identify focal points from their countries so that participation in the Group can be maximised.

12. In closing the discussion, the need for close and regular interaction between the Chairs of the Research and Cross-Cutting Groups was emphasised so as to avoid duplication of effort. The Groups' role in providing tools, technologies, etc to help farmers was also noted in terms of their focus being broader than just research. Their collective vision, as expressed in the presentation to the Ministerial Summit was seen as helpful in this regard.

ALLIANCE PARTNERS

13. The Chair opened the discussion on Alliance Partners by highlighting paragraph 39 of the Charter – the Council's job was to identify an initial set of organisations to invite as Partners and to agree the way in which they would participate. The following key points were made during the discussion:

- No need to try and identify all possible Partners at once, the Alliance is still developing.
- It is clear that there will be different types of Partners, e.g. people we need to speak to in practical, day-to-day discussions; then there is something above this – a more formal relationship with the Council that acknowledges that Partner and its core role in the Alliance.
- These more formal Partners need to understand the obligations of the Charter and not misuse or misrepresent their association with the Alliance. This may require modalities to help guide their participation.
- Approaching potential Partners should not wait until these modalities have been developed. These could be advanced while an initial set of the most obvious (and uncontroversial) Partners are invited.

14. The Council identified the following as an initial set of organisations to approach as Partners:

- DG Research (European Commission)
- FAO
- World Bank
- Regional development banks
- CGIAR
- CATIE

15. The Council invited the Secretariat to draft letters of invitation. These will be circulated to the Council for consideration and approval before being distributed to Partner organisations by the Secretariat. It was also agreed that further work needed to be done on a more comprehensive approach to partnerships, for example how to involve the private sector and philanthropic organisations (e.g. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation). The UK agreed to put some initial thoughts together on this for the Council's consideration.

STATEMENT FROM MINISTER AGUERRE, URUGUAY

16. There was a brief interlude for Tabaré Aguerre, Uruguay's Minister of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries, to address the Council meeting. The Minister had been unable to attend the Summit due to flight difficulties and so joined the Council meeting briefly. He gave his personal endorsement to the Alliance and acknowledged the efforts of all countries in bringing the initiative to this point and for its future achievements.

COMMUNICATION POLICY

17. In opening the discussion on the draft Communication Policy, the Chair reiterated paragraph 41 of the Charter – the development of a communication policy to guide external communication made on behalf of the Alliance.

18. The Vice Chair outlined the process to date. The need for a Communication Policy was identified at the Senior Officials Meeting in Versailles. Subsequently, Australia and Argentina had worked together to produce this (circulated as a first draft in early May). Countries provided a number of comments and a second draft was circulated in mid-June that built on these and clarified

some drafting issues. Two countries had since provided comments on this second draft – a version of which was screened at the Council meeting.

19. The Council read through the second draft during the meeting. During the wide-ranging discussion, the following points were made:

- There is no question that communication – both internal and external – is fundamental to the success of the Alliance.
- Acknowledgement of the need for scientists to be free to speak about their work, but respect for individual countries' sensitive information/data.
- A commonsense and practical approach is required so that we can champion the Alliance publicly, but not risk its reputation or that of individuals/countries participating in it.
- The Alliance is a science and research-based endeavour, not a policy or political body (nor a bureaucracy).
- The Communication Policy cannot set up a cumbersome system that has the Council signing off on every piece of external communication about the Alliance.
- In time, there may be merit in identifying different types of communications that require different kinds of restrictions. The first year of the Council could be a period for doing this.
- The outputs from the Research and Cross-Cutting Groups over the next 6-12 months will help build trust and confidence in the approach to communication and ensure that a pragmatic, responsible approach is taken.

20. As well as these substantive issues, a number of drafting suggestions were made to help improve understanding and readability of the document.

21. In concluding the discussion, the Council agreed that external communication, where someone is speaking *on behalf* of the Alliance, needs to be approved by the Council. (Example: the Council issuing a media release). Where someone is speaking *about the Alliance* but not on its behalf, the Communication Policy requirements can be less restrictive although would require the use of disclaimers and adherence with the relevant style guide. (Example: a Research Group talking about its work; an individual country talking about its involvement).

22. The Secretariat was invited to produce a third draft for circulation to countries by 29 June 2011 that took on board the discussions at the Council meeting. The Council would continue to work on the Policy, with a view to approving it via an electronic decision-making process in due course. If this is not possible, it could be discussed again face-to-face at the 2012 Council meeting in Canada.

UPCOMING MILESTONES/KEY ALLIANCE ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT TWELVE MONTHS

Research Groups

23. The Council noted that work is already well underway in the Research and Cross-Cutting Groups and the Council looks forward to seeing the results of these in the next 12 months. The next Council meeting should be an opportunity to review this work. The upcoming meetings of the Groups were confirmed:

- **13-14 JULY 2011:** Soil C&N Cross-Cutting Group workshop – Leuven, Belgium (in the margins of an International Symposium on Soil Organic Matter)
- **20 OCTOBER 2011:** Croplands Research Group meeting – San Antonio, Texas, USA (in the margins of the annual Soil Science Society international meetings)

- **5-6 NOVEMBER 2011:** Livestock Research Group meeting – Amsterdam, the Netherlands (in the margins of the 6th Int. Symposium on Non-CO2 Greenhouse Gases)
- **18 NOVEMBER 2011:** Paddy Rice Group meeting – Tsukuba, Japan
- **MID-NOVEMBER 2011 (TBC):** Inventory & Measurement Cross-Cutting Group workshop proposed in Canada

24. Council representatives were asked to make sure that they had nominated contact points for the Research and Cross-Cutting Groups that their country was interested in participating in (some countries have still not done this). With the meeting dates being advised so early, contact points for the Groups could begin arranging for their country's attendance, including any necessary visas.

25. Council members were also encouraged to make sure that their Research and Cross-Cutting Group representatives were kept abreast of the Council discussions and were also involved in any domestic coordination and outreach on the Alliance.

Partners

26. As noted in paragraph 15, the Secretariat will draft a letter of invitation for Council to review and approve. The Secretariat will then begin approaching the first set of Alliance Partners. Countries with other suggestions for Partners should contact the Secretariat. The UK's offer to develop a thinkpiece on the role of the private sector/philanthropics in the Alliance was welcomed.

Communication Policy

27. As noted in paragraph 22, the Secretariat will circulate the third draft on Wednesday 29 June 2011 (Central European Time) for comment. It is hoped that the Council will be able to conclude the development and adoption of the Communication Policy electronically.

Domestic coordination

28. The need for good domestic coordination on the Alliance within each Member country was noted, with Council members being seen as primarily responsible for this. All were encouraged to reach out to others domestically to ensure they understand the Alliance and the opportunities for participation. Confirmation of countries' official contact points for each of the Research and Cross-Cutting Groups was also urged (refer paragraph 24).

Memberships

29. Council representatives were encouraged to reach out to non-member countries wherever the opportunity presents. The Alliance cannot remain a small club – it needs as broad a membership as possible – this is a responsibility for everyone.

Next Council meeting

30. The next Council meeting will be held in Canada in mid-2012 (likely May or early June to avoid Rio+20 and other international events). More information will follow in due course. In the intervening months, countries were asked to stay in touch with each and with the Secretariat to maintain the strong sense of community that has been developed.

APPENDIX 1: Participants List

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