

COPMOP2018 - PRRI Statement on Conflict of Interest

Thank you Chair,

I speak on behalf of the PRRI delegation.

Chair, as public sector scientists we passionately support the notion that in the interest of the objectives of the Convention any scientific advice builds on the highest level of relevant scientific expertise and is of the highest level of scientific quality, which means that bias should be avoided to the extent possible.

Chair, in this context we submit the following observations.

First, the draft text should specify how to secure a high level of relevant scientific expertise. Lack of relevant expertise can lead to bias, because a person who does not have the needed scientific expertise is likely to extract an opinion from his or her own perception.

Second, the draft text should clarify that with “conflict of interest” we mean conflict with the interest of the objectives of the Convention. In this context it is important to remember that articles 16 and 19 of the Convention underline the importance of biotechnology for achieving the objectives of the CBD.

Third, we should recognize that a possible conflict of interest in itself does not necessarily result in bias. For example: general bans on the use of LMOs that some countries have imposed are in conflict with the Convention and the Biosafety Protocol, because such bans are not based on scientifically sound risk assessments. However, such bans in themselves do not necessarily mean that experts from countries with such bans will by definition provide expert-advice with a bias.

Summarising, Mr Chair, we submit that independence in scientific advice is not about perceptions but about whether such advice is sufficiently transparent and substantiated so that it can be independently verified.

Thank you Chair