

Minutes from the Fifth Joint Regional Project Steering Committee Meeting Via Zoom

Conference Call

07:00 PM MONDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2020

RSC/INFP2/02/2022

Participants

Ms. Amanda Wheatley SPREP Biodiversity Adviser and Chairperson

Dr. Andreas Drews – Manager ABS Initiative

Dr. Daniel Robinson – Associate Professor UNSW & ABS Initiative Regional Coordinator

Dr. Geoff Burton – GEF Consultant

Mr. Jeffery Leung Wai – UNDP Samoa

Ms. Florence van Houtte – EU Commission in Brussels

Ms. Mery Ciacci – EU Commission in Brussels

Ms. Manoela Pessoa De Miranda – Task Manager UN Environment

Mr. King Sam– Ministry of Natural Resources, Palau & Micronesia sub-regional representative

Ms. ‘Ofa Kaisamy- ABS Legal Adviser, SPREP

Mr. Rahul Chand-ABS Capacity Development Officer, SPREP

Mr. James Faiumu – ABS Technical and Finance Assistant, SPREP

Apologies:

Ms Tilia Asau – Tuvalu and representative for the Polynesian sub-region;

Mr. Clark Peteru SPREP Legal Counsel;

Absent:

Ms. Rose Alphonse – Papua New Guinea and representative of the Melanesian sub-region.

Agenda Item 1: Opening

The meeting was opened by the Chair Ms. Amanda Wheatley, Biodiversity Adviser for SPREP and Manager for the SPREP ABS Project. Steering Committee Members joined via zoom conference call.

Agenda Item 2: Quorum

The meeting did not have the quorum as required under the Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee since only one representative of three sub regions were present. The other two representatives from Polynesia and Melanesia had confirmed their attendance however, only Palau representing Micronesia attended the meeting. The minimum number for the quorum was four that must include at least two sub regional representatives of the member countries.

Consequently, the Chair decided to proceed with the meeting after receiving a message from Tuvalu that the meeting should proceed as planned and decisions to be circulated on email for feedback.

Item 3: Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted, without change.

Item 4: Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The Secretariat requested a small amendment in Page 3, Item 7: Annual Workplan and Budget for 2019 to be corrected from 2019 to 2020. There were no further comments on the minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising from it.

Item 5: COVID-19 Impacts and Activity Updates.

5.1 The Chair invited the ABS Initiative Project to provide an update on the progress in implementation of the project and the impacts of COVID-19. Dr Daniel Robinson (ABS Initiative Pacific Coordinator) provided a verbal update on the progress and achievements of the Project in January to September of 2020. Detailed information on this agenda is attached as a document titled *Pacific Workplan 2020-2021 COVID update* in the meeting papers.

5.2 Following the presentation by the ABS Initiative Project, the Chair invited other members if they had specific inputs to make on the progress of implementation of ABS work in the region. Dr. Geoff Burton provided a brief update on the ABS work in Samoa particularly on the development of the Environment Management and Conservation (EMC) bill and drafting of a standalone ABS law.. In addition to that Dr Geoff mentioned about his assistance towards the development of the communication strategy which establishes domestic ABS Clearinghouse, Traditional Knowledge guidelines, model contracts and for seeking potential opportunities and partnerships.

5.3 The Chair then invited the Secretariat to provide an update on the progress in implementation of the ABS regional project and the impacts of COVID-19. The Secretariat provided a verbal update on the progress and achievements of the Project of the period January to September 2020. Detailed information on this agenda item is provided in the document attached as *RSC14092020BriefReport_Final*.

5.4 Under the same agenda, the Secretariat updated members on the progress made on the development of ABS regulation for Palau and plans in the pipeline relating to ABS guideline for Tuvalu in 2020.

Item 6: Strategic Decisions on Project Implementation (Challenges and Future Directions)

6.1 The Chair introduced this agenda item 6 that required a decision to be made. The Secretariat was requested to provide further information to the Committee in order for deliberations on the recommendations of the paper being tabled before endorsement was sought.

6.2 The Committee noted that the ABS Legal Adviser's contract has come to an end with her taking up a new appointment as the Manager of the Pacific Climate Change Centre . The Committee also deliberated on the need and justification for the proposed redistribution of the salary of the Legal

Adviser towards others components as attested in the document *RSC14092020StrategicDecisions_fina* of the meeting papers.

6.3 The Committee discussed at length on the redistribution of the funds from the ABS Legal Advisers salary to other activities including salary increments to the other two existing staff in the project (Capacity Building Officer & Technical and Finance Assistant). The redistribution of the project meant that CDO and ABSTFA project officers' salaries will be supplemented by 10% of their annual salary and other adjustments to the budget is attached as a document labelled *RSC14_09_2021 RevisedBudget_FINAL* in the meeting papers.

6.4 The Secretariat also highlighted another important issue at hand, the termination of the ABS Legal Advisers position from the project structure. In essence, this meant that upon completion of the current contract of the ASB Legal Adviser, the vacancy will not arise for this position as this position will no longer be required in the project.

6.5 Ms. Florence expressed concerns of eliminating the ABSLA position from the project given there are still some legal works to be done in the next 12 months. The Secretariat reaffirmed that the project had achieved more than what had been anticipated especially in the year 2019. Ms. Manoela suggested we review the decision of eliminating the ABSLA in the next Steering Committee Meeting to see if the project will operate smoothly without the ABSLA or otherwise.

6.6 Dr. Burton, Dr. Andreas, Dr. Daniel, and Mr. King commended the work of ABSLA and welcomed the proposal for redistribution of the ABSLA salary with the clear justifications. Dr. Andreas highlighted the importance of continuity of the work and utilizing the remaining funds until 2021 and agreeing with the justification provided. With support from Dr. Bruton, Dr. Andreas, Dr. Daniel, Mr. King, Mr. Jeffery, Ms. Manoela, Ms. Florence and Ms. Mery, the Chair suggested that the Committee appears to have come to a consensus on the proposed recommendations and therefore requested endorsement which was dually done.

Decision

The Steering Committee endorsed that the ABSLA position be vacated once the current ABSLA leaves for new appointment as the Manager of PCCC and her salary be re-distributed to agreed project activities from October 2020 to December 2021; and that the Committee will review the effectiveness of this decision in the next Steering Committee Meeting.

Item 7: Annual Work Plan and Budget For 2019

7.1 The Chair invited the Secretariat to present the budget and annual work plan which was attached in meeting papers as document *RSC14_09_2021 RevisedBudget_FINAL*.

7.2 In its presentation, the Secretariat informed the members that the Project wishes to carry out with the original workplan for the year as it has been approved in the January Steering Committee Meeting.

7.3 The re-allocation breakdown tabled at the meeting provided a 10% supplement to the salaries of the 1101 ABSCDO \$12,200, 1103 & 1104 ABSTFA \$4,197.50. A further allocation to 1202 Communication Services \$10,000. 1601 CDO Travel \$10,000. 3201 Intraregional Exchange \$70,000. 3202 National Workshops \$24,000. 3203 Communication Services \$3,175. 3204 Sub-regional workshop \$10,000. 4101 Office Supplies PSC and Communications \$10,000. 5501 Audit Fees \$15,000. 5504 Bank Fees \$10,000.

7.4 With support from Dr. Bruton, Dr. Andreas, Dr. Daniel, Mr. King, Mr. Jeffery, Ms. Manoela, Ms. Florence and Ms. Mery, the Chair suggested that the Committee endorse the proposed re-distribution of ABSLA salary as tabled which was dually done.

Decision: The re-allocation of the ABSLA salary be re-distributed in accordance with the presented budget. (No additions were made to the overall budget)

Agenda 8: Other Matters

8.1 The Secretariat invited recommendation for the next Steering Committee Meeting. Dr Daniel suggested to have the next meeting in the second week of February 2021. The Secretariat also recommended that we have an in-person meeting by mid-year 2021 in the hopes that the borders open again in 2021.

8.2 The members acknowledged the service rendered by the current ABSLA Ofa Kaisamy and her contribution to the project and are sad to see her leave. The members wished her the best of luck in her new role as the Manager of the PCCC. Finally, the Chair acknowledged the Secretariat that prepared and coordinated the meeting which went without any major issues and hindrance.

8.3 There being no other item left on the agenda, the Chair closed the meeting at 09.15 pm.