German Nagoya Protocol HuB

REPORT

2nd GNP HuB Network Meeting (2. Stammtisch)

3 December 2020, 13:00-15:00 (online meeting)

The second round of the GNP HuB's regular online meeting, i.e. the "Stammtisch", took place on 3 December 2020, bringing together practitioners from the German academic research sector to exchange on the Nagoya Protocol and what this means for document and sample management.

Quick Project Update

The meeting started with a quick project update from the project manager, Elizabeth Karger.

Flyers and posters have been designed and are being printed. They can be ordered by the network participants and will be distributed to the institutes by post early in 2021. There will also be a small poster challenge in 2021 so participants should stay tuned for more information!

An email about outreach and awareness-raising was sent out to the network recently. This resulted in some enquiries and a number of requests for information sessions at various institutions.

Later this year, the GNP HuB website will go online. The website should provide an entry point for researchers into the Nagoya Protocol and their obligations, addressing common questions etc. Of course, it will still be possible to contact the help desk with other questions.

Finally, the possibility of having small ad-hoc discussions within the network on topics of interest was raised. There have already been some suggestions made by participants. Anyone who is interested in participating should contact the help desk.

Document and Sample Management - Impulse presentations and Q&A

To introduce the topic of "Document and Sample Management", there were three short impulse presentations.

First, Dirk Neumann from DNFS spoke about the CETAF Code of Conduct (CoC), which is freely available on the Internet and can in theory be used by anyone as a tool to support compliant document and sample management. He noted that the challenges with managing samples and documentation are well-known.

Conducting a self-evaluation and developing processes and procedures are key to ensuring that permits are effectively linked to the relevant samples. The CoC, which consists of a main section (voluntary commitment to the CoC) and seven annexes with various tools like model clauses and checklists, is like a recipe for compliance. The CoC encourages institutions to treat all biological material as potentially being relevant for access and benefit-sharing (ABS) and thus ensuring that the required permits have been obtained.

Scarlett Sett of the DSMZ followed with an input on the Nagoya compliance strategy of the "European Virus Archive" (EVA-Global). This project maintains a catalogue of samples from 29 partner countries. To improve legal certainty and usability of the material in the catalogue, a process was initiated to check all samples for Nagoya Protocol compliance. In the first step, the minimum compliance criteria were defined, namely that at least the country of origin and collection date of a sample must be indicated. This information is now obligatory, meaning that members of the consortium whose samples do not meet these criteria must take corrective action within a given period of time or remove the samples from the EVA catalogue. The EVA-Global project also offered a "Nagoya Crash Course" for all of the EVA Global project partners.

Monique Hölting from the Zoologisches Forschungsmuseum Koenig gave an overview of the museum's internal ABS database, which is used to support compliance. A workflow has been developed so that documents and specimens can be linked to one another. A crucial element of this system is the allocation of an individual number for each document (date/country/permit code). This number is used in the database and written on the original documents. While document storage and management remains the responsibility of the respective research departments, a hard copy of all documents is stored centrally with the person responsible for the Nagoya Protocol and a scanned copy is uploaded to the database. This should enable documents to be found easily and makes it possible for the museum’s researchers to directly check which documents belong to a particular sample.

Elizabeth Karger of the GNP HuB presented the results of the survey conducted on institutional challenges. The survey covered policies and procedures, responsibilities, document and sample management, communication and awareness-raising, dealing with user controls, and inter-institutional approaches. Most of the survey participants identified “policies and procedures” and the “definition of responsibilities” as being the most important factors for compliance. The participants reported various challenges, particularly the lack of oversight in terms of what Nagoya Protocol relevant work is being done, the lack of workflows and procedures, difficulties in adapting existing systems to support compliance, uncertainties in dealing with different samples from different countries, and lack of financial, administrative, and time resources for the ABS process and institutional adaptation. Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to some of these issues but the GNP HuB project can help support institutions, e.g. by developing infographics for users and institutions as well as organizing a workshop on these issues. Ms. Karger also quickly went through users obligations under Regulation (EU) No 511/2014 (EU Regulation), pointing out that effective document management is essential for “users” but also makes sense for all researchers, even if they are not within the scope of the EU law.

Group discussions

After the impulse presentations, Stammtisch participants had the chance to exchange in five small groups that focused on several different topics: gaining an overview; systematization; and document and sample management in everyday life.

Below is a summary of the results of those discussions, which were presented in the plenum.

Groups 1 and 2: Gaining an overview – what's Nagoya Protocol relevant at my institution?

- Many institutions do not have an overview of what work is being done that is Nagoya Protocol relevant.
- Some institutions have conducted internal surveys to get information about this. These surveys can be difficult to coordinate, e.g. if an institution is spread across different locations or the survey causes friction with researchers. Personal follow up with some individuals after the survey may be necessary but this can be time-consuming. However, a survey can be very helpful for getting an overview and targeting information to researchers for whom it is relevant.
- Having a central contact person at the institute can help filter information for researchers. Useful tools like the CETAF Code of Conduct and Best Practice or the ABS Guidelines from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft are not well-known among researchers and these documents are sometimes too long and complicated for individuals to use them effectively.
- Cross-institutional services that provide support, e.g. legal advice, would be helpful.
- Provision of useful information resources is important but is not always sufficient to prevent researchers from conducting their research in a non-compliant way.
- Information resources must be specifically tailored to the target audience.
- Awareness-raising is key. Some groups may be more receptive than others, e.g. young scientists.
- Nagoya Protocol compliance could be communicated as being part of responsible research.
- Word choice is important. The word "genetic" is misleading and should be avoided when introducing people to the topic of compliance for the first time.
- Databases play a key role in maintaining an overview. Filtering information can be an important step, e.g. which material predates the Nagoya Protocol and for which there are no obligations under the EU Regulation. It is also important to identify which samples come from countries without any ABS obligations. The ABS Clearing House is an important resource for going through this process.
- It was noted that the GNP HuB help desk cannot provide detailed information about ABS requirements in individual countries. Institutions are responsible for informing themselves and contacting National Focal Points. If they are unsure about how to approach ABS, the website and the help desk are a good starting point.
- It was noted that it is important that if proposed research is not covered by the existing ABS documentation, the researchers should contact the National Focal Point and re-start the ABS process (if necessary).

Group 3: Systematization – integrating ABS into sample and document management systems

- Databases for sample and document management should have a clear structure and predefined use rights.
- Data should always be kept in a way that everyone can find it, i.e. it is not dependent upon one person knowing where the information is.
- Information must be traceable.
- It makes sense to look at which systems already exist and to expand upon them. Linking changes with existing workflows is a useful approach.

- Contractual content may be subject to confidentiality. In this case, contracts cannot simply be made available in the database for everyone. A careful review must be carried out in advance about which information can be shared.

Groups 4 and 5: Document and sample management in everyday life

- The lack of workflows for researchers and the time invested by individuals in ABS are major issues.
- Many institutions are still at the very beginning of effectively documenting ABS.
- Decentralized solutions have evolved but in many cases, there are no central databases that record information about ABS.
- Nagoya compliance officers do not always receive information about what is being done.
- Nagoya Protocol compliance has to be followed up regularly with researchers.
- Many researchers only became aware of the EU Regulation as a result the recent BfN user checks. Completing the BfN's questionnaire was challenging for many people/institutions.
- Communication about ABS with collaboration partners in other countries can be difficult. This is a topic that could be taken up at further network meetings.
- People in the network were encouraged to share their experiences with databases with other network participants.

Summary and Outlook

Overall, there were lively discussions and many interesting impulses at the 2nd GNP HuB Stammtisch which showed the importance of exchange. For a number of participants, it also pointed out the deficits in their own institutions. The Stammtisch also showed that effective networking is still possible even without physical contact – we need to keep the exchange going.

The next Stammtisch is planned for March 2021.