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**LETTER REPORT: IMPLICATIONS OF THE TRANSFER OF THE FOOD INSPECTION  
FUNCTION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE DRDC-CSS BIOLOGY  
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. This letter report describes a way forward for the Biological Community of Practice (CoP) in the light of the transfer of the administration of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency from the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada to the Minister of Health. This report was solicited by the CSS Executive.

**BACKGROUND**

2. The Biological Community of Practice (Bio cluster) is one of the original three communities of practice established to address biological threats in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 attacks under the auspices of the CBRN Research & Technology Initiative (CRTI) program<sup>1</sup>. The then Bio cluster was led by a Chair and Co-Chair who rotated roles annually. These roles were rotated between the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). One of the primary roles of the leads of the cluster was to determine work plans for the cluster.

3. The Bio cluster now referred to as the Bio Community of Practice or Bio CoP is co-led by a DG each from the CFIA and PHAC. The latter has delegated the day to day activities to a Chief within PHAC.

**RESULTS**

**Transfer of administrative responsibilities**

4. Effective October 7, 2013, through an order in council of the Privy Council Office<sup>2</sup>, the federal government decided to move the administration of the food inspection component of Canadian Food Inspection Agency's portfolio to Health Canada (HC).

5. The oversight of food inspection and food safety now rests with the Minister of Health along with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). This comes 16 years after the date of the formation of CFIA when the Agency assumed responsibility for inspecting all plants, animals and food reporting to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC).

6. The Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada (AAFC) will continue to oversee CFIA plant and animal health, plant varietal regulation and export promotion work. The details of the logistics and division of responsibilities remain to be worked out.

7. This transfer may facilitate an amalgamation of all food safety associated functions under one Department with a potential for improvement in sharing of information and communications. This may also be perceived as a conflict of interest between the regulatory, policy, threshold setting and the inspection arms of HC. On the other hand, AAFC would now be in a position to promote Canadian food abroad as part of trade missions in an unbiased fashion.

## **Biological CoP Areas of Investigation**

8. Today, the Bio CoP has three areas of investigation, namely, food safety, medical countermeasures and animal health. As a consequence of the newly announced transfer, two of these three would fall within the direct oversight of Health Canada.

## **Implications for the Biological CoP**

9. The folding of all of public health including the food portfolio under HC relative to CFIA administering the plant and animal health through AAFC is not only an intriguing division of oversight responsibilities but will also have implications for the Biological CoP.

10. In general, food safety concerns originate from plant or animal sources. As an example, a meat issue likely originates from a livestock issue. Therefore it would need to be addressed by HC and AAFC with the CFIA in the midst reporting to two Ministers, of Health and AAFC.

11. Food safety incidents of the recent past such as listeria-contaminated products from a Maple Leaf Foods plant in 2008 and E. coli in products from an XL Foods plant in Alberta last year were handled by the CFIA. Similar cases in the future would need to be addressed by HC, CFIA and potentially AAFC for livestock or grain concerns and other Departments such as Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) for fish products.

12. Overall, this creates an opportunity for re-examining the terms of reference, governance, S&T leadership, and the priorities of the Bio CoP. This is also topical as CSS considers its organizational chart with respect to the ecology of all CoP's, i.e. CoP's that existed since the inception of CSS, such as CRTI (including the Bio cluster), ones added on, others that self-formed and the overall outcomes of the Canadian Safety and Security Program (CSSP).

13. The last round of the terms of reference for this CoP were formulated at the time of its creation (2001), prior to its amalgamation in to the CSSP (2012). Now, more than a decade after its inception it is important to maintain the tools and capabilities developed thus far and reformulate its priorities. In rewriting the terms of reference there should be a formal inclusion of the means through which the CoP will formulate its priorities every 3 years.

14. A large percentage of the current effort of the Bio CoP lies in the area of animal health (principally livestock) and development of medical countermeasures. Having developed such capabilities enables one to examine other horizontal areas of investigation such as fish health, surveillance of plant and microbial health that impact the health safety and security continuum. Identifying and funding areas that may have been overlooked would assist in strengthening S&T capabilities which could be used by responder communities such as the Emergency Management CoP. As the areas of responsibilities that the Bio CoP examines evolves, the

Portfolio Manager of the Bio CoP from CSS may be better positioned to assume the role of key broker for influencing outcomes of the CoP relative to officials from other government departments. This is also the case for several other CoPs since Portfolio Managers best understand their community, and the outcomes that CSSP is trying to achieve thereby enhancing a purpose-built program aligned with the Defence and Security S&T Strategy<sup>3</sup>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Three recommendations are proposed for the CoP to assume a more strategic posture and for its reinvigoration.

1. Consider reformulating the terms of reference to include a prioritizing exercise for CoP projects every 3 years,
2. Consider appointing the Portfolio Manager as the broker of the CoP with a deputy co-chair as S&T expert nominated by the CoP from AAFC, CFIA or PHAC assuming the co-chair role in rotation or similar functional structure.
3. Invest in priority areas especially those that have not been examined in the past to develop and maintain new capabilities of use to the safety and security of Canadians.

16. This report is written to advise the CSS Executive, 'the client', to enable them to make informed decisions for setting priorities that help build & sustain the Biological Community of Practice.

## REFERENCES

1. Outline of the purpose, roles and responsibilities of the Biological cluster (October 2005) accessed on 1 Nov 2013  
[G:\3000\3780-30a Biological\3780-31ab Biological - Portfolio Planning and Administration\Biology Cluster\Bio Cluster Documents\CFIA\\_ACIA-#352039-CRTI Bio Cluster Business Plan Final 11Oct05.DOC](G:\3000\3780-30a Biological\3780-31ab Biological - Portfolio Planning and Administration\Biology Cluster\Bio Cluster Documents\CFIA_ACIA-#352039-CRTI Bio Cluster Business Plan Final 11Oct05.DOC)
2. Privy Council Office, Order in Council number 2013-1053 issued 4 October 2013, accessed on 28 October 2013.  
<http://www.pco-bcp.gc.ca/oic-ddc.asp?lang=eng&page=secretariats>
3. The Defence and Security S&T Strategy 2013

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