

March 2011



منظمة الأغذية  
والزراعة للأمم  
المتحدة

联合国  
粮食及  
农业组织

Food and  
Agriculture  
Organization  
of the  
United Nations

Organisation des  
Nations Unies  
pour  
l'alimentation  
et l'agriculture

Продовольствен  
ная и  
сельскохозяйств  
енная  
организация  
Объединенных  
Наций

Organización  
de las  
Naciones Unidas  
para la  
Agricultura y la  
Alimentación

## COUNCIL

### Hundred and Forty-first Session

Rome, 11-15 April 2011

### Open-ended Working Group on measures designed to increase the efficiency of Governing Bodies, including representation

#### Executive Summary

- Since the last progress report to Council covering the outcome of previous deliberations in 2010, the OEWG held its third meeting in February 2011.
- The present report reflects cumulative progress since the OEWG's inception on issues addressed, namely: (i) membership of Council; (ii) working arrangements of the Technical Committees; (iii) preparation for, conduct of, and reporting on meetings of Council and Committees, including timeliness and accuracy of documentation; (iv) revised Note on the methods of work of Council; and (v) modern technologies for Governing Body sessions and inter-sessional work.

#### Suggested action by the Council

- The Council is invited to note the overall progress made by the OEWG and to provide such guidance as it deems appropriate in view of the finalization of its report to the Conference in June-July 2011.
- The Council may also wish to endorse the recommendations made by the OEWG regarding sessions of the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Commodity Problems in terms of duration and format.

*Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:*

Ali Mekouar

Director, Conference, Council and Protocol Affairs Division

Tel: +3906 5705 5612

## I. Background

1. In 2009 the Conference decided to establish an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) which, in the course of the 2010-11 biennium, would review and make recommendations regarding measures designed to increase the efficiency of the Governing Bodies, including representation. The OEWG was expected to draw, as appropriate, on the advice of the relevant Governing Bodies and to report to the Conference through the Council.

2. The OEWG was established at a meeting of FAO Members, called by the Independent Chairperson of Council, on 9 April 2010. As scheduled, the OEWG met three times: on 13 July and 23 September 2010; and on 22 February 2011. Building on the interim progress report submitted to the previous session of the Council<sup>1</sup>, the present document reports further progress achieved by the OEWG at its last meeting. The final report of the OEWG will be considered by the forthcoming session of the FAO Conference in June-July 2011.

3. As per its mandate, the OEWG discussed the issue of Council membership, covered in section II, in addition to addressing a number of measures aimed at improving governance processes and working methods, which are described in section III.

## II. Membership of Council

4. The membership of Council was on the agenda of the OEWG at its three scheduled meetings. As regards the number of Council seats, there was a widely shared conviction about the need to forge a broad consensus among Members, thus avoiding a vote on this issue at the Conference. However, an agreement could not be reached in this regard within the OEWG, with preferences being expressed mainly for two options: (i) either an increase in membership to 61; or (ii) maintaining the *status quo*, in which case the issue would remain open for further examination in the future.

5. As these preferences echoed the opinions for or against the enlargement of the Council, which had emerged from deliberations in the previous Conference Committees for the Follow-up to the Independent External Evaluation of FAO (CoC-IEE) in the course of 2008 and 2009, the OEWG deemed it pertinent to recall their rationale, as follows.

### 1. Positions of Members

6. Members supporting the option of an increase in seats argued that this would be in line with the growth of the membership of the Organization since 1977, thus ensuring wider participation, inclusiveness and representation of Members, and therefore leading to a more effective Council. It was further considered that a larger number of seats would be in keeping with the increased responsibilities of the Council arising from the Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal (IPA).

7. Members opposing the enlargement of the Council membership considered that: (i) an increase in the number of seats would adversely affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council in its executive functions; and (ii) more equitable representation in the Council could be better achieved by ensuring regular rotation among Members within the Regional Groups. Moreover, this would not be consistent with the alternative proposal made in the IEE report to reform the Council along the lines of an executive board – an option which could lead to enhanced sense of ownership and trust among Members.

8. During the discussion of this matter in the OEWG, it was noted that other ways of addressing the issue of equitable representation in the Council included the possibility of: (i) reducing the length of the term of Members from three to two years; and (ii) limiting the number of consecutive terms of office to two.

---

<sup>1</sup> CL 140/19.

## 2. *Proposal from the Independent Chairperson of Council*

9. In order to facilitate consensus, the Independent Chairperson of Council (ICC) circulated in October 2010 to OEWG Members a proposal setting forth a package of measures designed both to improve representation in Council and to enhance the efficiency of its work.

10. The main elements of the proposal from the ICC were:

- an increase in the number of Council seats from the present 49 to 56;
- a reduction in the term of office of Council Members from the current duration of three to two years, which would be in harmony with the biennial cycle of the Organization and its Governing Bodies, with the rotation of Council Members within the Regional Groups remaining under the responsibility of each Regional Group;
- as with other Governing Bodies, enhanced efficiency would be achieved through the combination of: (i) timeliness of documents, which would also be more focused and action-oriented; (ii) effective conduct of debates, with clear and concise summaries by the Chairperson; and (iii) use of new technologies when appropriate;
- the Council report would essentially consist of conclusions, decisions and recommendations, with the draft report drawn up by the Secretariat being sent to the ICC for information, and then submitted to the Drafting Committee for review;
- for inter-sessional work, the ICC would be assisted by a Council bureau (in addition to the informal meetings already held with the Chairpersons of the Regional Groups and the Council Committees).

11. In appreciating the ICC proposal, the OEWG reaffirmed its full endorsement of the efficiency measures proposed, namely the requirement of: (i) timely and concise meeting documents, with points for decision precisely outlined in front page boxes; (ii) clear summaries by the Chairperson focusing on the conclusions, decisions and recommendations arising from agenda items, to serve as a basis for the draft report. There was also wide support for the current arrangement whereby the authority to decide on rotation of Council Members is vested in the Regional Groups concerned.

12. The OEWG noted that different views were expressed on the establishment of a Council bureau, as outlined in the proposal of the ICC, with Members either: (i) supporting this new arrangement; or (ii) preferring the maximum use of informal meetings with the Chairpersons of the Regional Groups regularly convened by the ICC to gather the type of support expected from a bureau.

## III. **Other governance issues**

### 1. *Working arrangements of the Technical Committees*

13. Bearing in mind that it was not expected to deal with matters addressed by other Governing Bodies as part of their respective mandates, the OEWG felt it appropriate to discuss where some degree of harmonization in the working methods of the Technical Committees could be achieved. This included the size and functions of *Bureaux*, as well as the duration and frequency of sessions of the Technical Committees, where problems had been experienced.

14. In so doing, the OEWG was cognizant of the outcomes of related discussions in other fora, particularly at the May 2010 session of Council and the April 2010 session of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (CCLM). In particular, the Council had invited the Technical Committees to examine their Rules of Procedure, taking into account the CCLM recommendations. The Council had acknowledged that authority to amend Rules of Procedure was vested in the Technical Committees, which had their own specific functional requirements. However, the Council had stressed the desirability of consistency among the Rules of Procedure of all Technical Committees.

15. As regards the *size of bureaux*, while it was pointed out that maximum inclusiveness in representation could be achieved by having up to 7 members participating in the *bureaux*, no consensus was reached on a given number. In the light of recent developments observed in some of the

Technical Committees, it was deemed appropriate that each Committee should determine the composition of its own *bureau* based on specific requirements. In so doing, due consideration should be given both to containing the incremental costs involved, as well as the additional workload for Members attending *bureau* meetings.

16. Concerning the *role of bureaux*, there was broad agreement on the following support and facilitation functions: (i) setting of the agendas for future sessions, in consultation with Regional Groups; (ii) information sharing on new developments during inter-sessional periods, and on possible follow-up actions. The OEWG noted in this context that the CCLM had recommended the addition of a generic reference to bureau functions, such as “ensuring preparations for the sessions”, to the Rules of Procedure of the Technical Committees, while considering that a more detailed description of such functions might not be required in view of their dynamic nature.

17. On the *timing of bureau election*, the OEWG supported the emerging trend of having the elections take place at the end of sessions, which was consistent with the expected proactive role of *bureaux* between sessions.

## **2. Duration of COAG and CCP sessions**

18. The OEWG recalled that, while the sessions of the Committees on Fisheries and Forestry normally have a duration of five days each, COAG and CCP had been holding back-to-back sessions over a six-day period since 2005. In view of recent concerns expressed by Members regarding the reduced time frames of the sessions of COAG (3,5 days) and CCP (2,5 days), the OEWG welcomed the consultations held in December 2010 by the ICC with the Chairpersons of COAG and CCP to seek new arrangements for the next cycle of sessions. It appreciated the presentations of the proposals made in this respect by the Chairperson of COAG and by the Secretary of CCP on behalf of the Chairperson of CCP at its meeting of February 2011.

19. Accordingly, the OEWG was generally of the view that the length and intricacy of the agendas of the two Committees could justify an increase in duration of their sessions. While it was stressed that all Committees should be mindful of the need to maximize effectiveness and avoid duplication in their deliberations, the proposed minor extensions in the duration of sessions for both COAG (one day) and CCP (half a day) were generally deemed justified and were therefore endorsed. This would allow, in particular, sufficient time for more in-depth discussion of priority areas of work, while reducing pressure on delegates to deal with important items during meetings after normal working hours.

20. It was also agreed that COAG and CCP sessions should continue to be held back-to-back, but over two consecutive weeks rather than within the same week as had been the case in recent biennia.

## **3. Timeliness and accuracy of Governing Body documents**

21. The OEWG addressed this issue based on proposals from the North America Regional Group. It supported proposals relating specifically to the *timing and accuracy of documentation for Governing Body meetings*. These included a transparent system for measuring and reporting on document preparation for Conference, Council and other Governing Bodies. The agreed proposals, which were endorsed by Council at its 140<sup>th</sup> Session, are reproduced in Annex 1.

22. The baseline for dispatch of documentation in all languages should be between two and four weeks ahead of the meetings. At the start of the relevant session, the Secretariat would provide a brief report summarizing any delay in issuing documents. In addition, actions expected of Members would be more clearly defined in the documents, e.g. for those marked “*for decision*”, the specific decision(s) expected from Members would be spelled out in a box.

## **4. Modern technologies for Governing Body sessions and inter-sessional work**

23. The OEWG appreciated the initial presentation by the Representative of Australia, on behalf of the South West Pacific Regional Group, of possible avenues of application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in support of Governing Bodies. The OEWG agreed that there

was merit in pursuing improvements in working methods based on the suggestions made, bearing in mind important considerations such as:

- the need to take account of differing capacities of access to, and use of, ICTs in all Member Nations;
- ensuring full transparency while safeguarding secrecy or confidentiality, when required;
- backing any proposals with adequate cost-benefit analysis;
- taking a progressive approach, preferably to all-embracing initiatives.

24. Reviewing a document subsequently prepared by the Secretariat on this matter, the OEWG noted that useful applications already in place included: (i) online regular communication through the Permanent Representatives Website; and (ii) digital recording of Conference and Council proceedings. In terms of further expansion of modern technologies, the OEWG considered the following potential applications during and between Governing Body sessions.

25. In-session:

- regular use of video-conference systems, e.g. to enable eminent speakers or FAO field staff to participate at minimal cost;
- Internet streaming of the proceedings of key meetings to ensure wider awareness in Member Nations;
- extension of digital recording to Governing Body sessions other than those of Council and Conference;
- introduction of an electronic voting system in large meeting rooms (Plenary Hall, Green and Red Rooms);
- automated queuing system for requesting the floor.

26. Between sessions:

- facilitated preparations of Governing Body sessions through restricted, and moderated, online fora;
- informal online surveys to seek Members' views on specific issues;
- between-session electronic clearance for non controversial matters;
- expansion of video-conferencing on matters of interest to Members throughout the decentralized offices network.

27. The OEWG received clarifications on some of the tools being considered, including the expected recurrent and investment costs involved, alongside the potential savings that could be generated through their use. For example, it was noted that savings could arise from increased recourse to video-conferencing. Cost implications, as estimated, are presented in Appendix 2, which also covers costs involved in relation to other measures addressed above.

28. Specifically, it was deemed important to ensure the required levels of confidentiality and accuracy of the proposed electronic voting system before deciding to proceed with its implementation. In addition, the Chairperson requested the Secretariat to ascertain the technical feasibility of terminating lengthy interventions made during Governing Body sessions by cutting off the speaker's microphone once the time-limit had been exceeded.

29. In more general terms, the OEWG expressed interest in seeing progress achieved along the lines suggested in the document. There was general agreement that the Secretariat could go forward in implementing the tools which appeared the least costly and the easiest to put in place for the benefit of Members.

30. As the proposed recourse to online fora to facilitate the preparation of Governing Body sessions would entail relatively higher costs, a more in-depth technical and financial analysis would be required to provide a basis for an informed decision by Members in due time.

## **5. *Revision of the Note on the methods of work of the Council***

31. In addition to the advice provided by the CCLM and Council, the OEWG contributed specific amendments during the process of revision of the *Note on the methods of work of the Council*. This document, which had been made available at each session of Council since 1973, required adjustments and updating to match the revised role, functions, practices and ways of working of the Council set out in the IPA and reflected in amendments to the Basic Texts adopted by the Conference in 2009.

32. The OEWG considered in particular that the revised Note should: (i) describe the Council functions in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Basic Texts; (ii) foresee membership engagement and interaction in the work of Council, with the ICC performing an enhanced facilitation role in the process; (iii) foresee membership involvement in inter-sessional work, including agenda setting; (iv) include details of standard formats for meeting documents; and (v) provide information on voting arrangements.

33. The text of the revised Note submitted to the present session of Council incorporates all the changes and additions agreed by the OEWG throughout the process.

## **6. *Arrangements for the preparation of reports***

34. In examining various items on its agenda, especially in connection with the working methods of Council and Technical Committees, the OEWG addressed the arrangements for the preparation of meeting reports as a cross-cutting issue. Discussions revolved mostly around the respective merits of the use of *Rapporteurs* versus the established practice of Drafting Committees, and eventually no clear consensus emerged on the most desirable formula.

35. An alternative option was also suggested in the form of a “validation group”, in lieu of the Drafting Committee, which would assess whether the draft report of a meeting accurately reflected the conclusions, decisions and recommendations emerging from the debates, as summarized by the Chairperson.

36. It was stressed that any option should respect the need to enable Members to participate in decision making in the FAO languages. Beyond the practical arrangement for the preparation of draft reports, it was considered that the prime focus of their substance should be on the agreed decisions and recommendations.

**Appendix 1****Agreed proposals on timing and accuracy of documentation for Governing Body meetings  
(as endorsed by the 140<sup>th</sup> session of the Council)**

1. The FAO Secretariat should use a transparent and predictable system for measuring and reporting on delivery of documents for Conference, Council and other Governing Body meetings. The baseline for preparation of documents should be between two and four weeks ahead of such meetings, including translation in official languages, posted on the Website.
2. At the start of relevant Governing Body sessions, the Secretariat should provide a brief (not to exceed 5 minutes) report summarizing the documentation preparation process, and make mention of the number of papers issued/available within the expected timeframe. These reports could be used over time as a basis for comparison in subsequent sessions to determine any variance in performance. Such statistics would also include information relevant to translations.
3. As regards the “accuracy” of final documentation such as reports, any attempt to modify texts from the floor during adoption should be done with the assistance of computer technology, on a screen visible to the entire plenary. Any changes accepted by the membership should be communicated as soon as possible in writing to Members.
4. The efficiency of Governing Body meetings would be enhanced by consistent arrangements whereby the decisions expected of Members are clearly defined in pre-session documents. If a paper is for “Information Only,” there may be no need for substantive discussion unless specifically requested by Members. If marked “For Debate,” a paper could be reviewed, staff questioned on its contents, and recommendations made by Members. If “For Decision,” a paper should clearly spell out up front what specific decision is being asked of Members. Whatever the format eventually agreed, it should be used consistently and accurately for all future sessions.
5. Governing Body documents of a less substantive nature should not necessarily pass through the Office of the Director-General for review.

## Appendix 2

## Incremental cost estimates for efficiency measures discussed in the OEWG

			Biennial recurrent costs (USD)	One-time costs (USD)
Chairperson's proposal for a more representative and more effective Council	Increase in Council seats from 49 to 56		175,000	
	Council Bureau		100,000	
Modern technologies for Governing Body sessions and inter-sessional work	In-session	Video-conferencing	Marginal incremental costs (USD 40-60/hour)	
		Internet streaming	No incremental cost	
		Extension of digital recording		100,000
		Electronic voting system		40,000
		Automated queuing system for requesting the floor		5,000
	Inter-sessional	Restricted online for a	160,000	100,000
		Informal online surveys		5,000
		Out-of-session electronic clearance		5,000
		Video-conferences between HQ and regional, sub-regional and country offices	Marginal incremental costs (USD 40-60/ hour)	
		Access to rules, policies and procedures	No incremental cost	
Access to senior management profiles		No incremental cost		
Working arrangements for Technical Committees	Bureaux meetings (for CCP, COAG, COFI and COFO)		120,000-240,000	
Extended sessions of CCP and COAG	CCP		10,500	
	COAG		25,000	