



NGRAC Meeting –October 19, 2022, Meeting Minutes

National Genetics Research Advisory Council Members Present: Dr. Jim McFerson (Chair), Dr. David Butruille, Dr. Paul Gepts, Dr. Margaret Smith, Dr. Terrence Tiersch, Dr. Sarada Krishnan, Dr. Katherine Rainey, and Stephen Kresovich– (8)

Members Absent:, Dr. Chad Dechow, Mr. Preston Hardison, Dr. Amir Ibrahim, Dr. John Buchanan, and Dr. Steven Kerns– (5)

Ex-Officio(s) Present: Dr. Peter Bretting

Ex-Officio(s) Not Present: Dr. Harvey Blackburn

NAREEE Board Staff Present: Kate Lewis, Executive Director

Guests Present: None.

I. Welcome, Roll Call, Administrative (Old Business)

Roll call pronounced at 1:04 p.m. DFO Kate Lewis asked the Council members if they had any changes to the minutes before she entertains a motion. Dr. Jim McFerson noted several issues he found in the minutes both grammatical and the incomplete content. It was decided that Dr. McFerson will e-mail his track changes to the minutes to DFO Lewis for her review. And after edits and updates have been made the minutes will be resent to the Council. And the minutes will either be approved before the next scheduled meeting or during the next meeting.

DFO Lewis informed the Council that the NGRAC minutes will be posted routinely to the NGRAC website starting with fiscal year (FY) 2023.

II. Update on NGRAC membership for FY23

DFO Lewis is still waiting on the vetting from the Agency’s White House liaison for the two new members. She also reported that two current members requested to be reappointed and that an extension of membership was given to Dr. David Butruille, Dr. Amir Ibrahim, Dr. Katherine Rainey, and Dr. Stephen Kresovich. DFO Lewis noted that the rationale for the extensions was done ensure that the Council was fully staffed while waiting to onboard new members.

III. Update on Administrative support

DFO Lewis has sent a proposal to Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young suggesting that the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) office reclassify the administrative/secretary/clerk position to a Program Analyst position. DFO Lewis is awaiting feedback and while she awaits that she is



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working to temporarily fill the positions necessary (i.e., Zara Wright, Science Writer). DFO Lewis hopes that she will have an update in November. DFO Lewis reported that in a few weeks a Detailee (Danielle Farley) will be welcomed on in November. Her main tasks will be: (1) bust through the log jam of transmitting the Councils and Committees and Sub-Committees work products and (2) helping work with the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) front office to develop a streamlined process of transmitting deliverables/work products.

IV. Update on NGRAC FY22 Work Products

DFO Lewis did not have any substantive updates. DFO Lewis is doing her best to work with Dr. Jacobs Young and her staff as well as Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to get the NGRAC deliverables transmitted. Dr. Peter Bretting updated that DFO Lewis and him spoke with a staff person in ARS that has a lot of experience in dealing with reports to Congress. Within the timeline the work has been approved, from there it goes to the REE Office of the Chief Scientist (that is where the issue lies). Stakeholders have been very patient, but the main question is when can it be shared with the public? Does it go to Congress first? Does the Office of Management and Budget need to be involved? This is an unusual circumstance as far as Dr. Bretting can tell and there is an uncertainty of the path to getting the document published. DFO Lewis promises to stay on this subject until she gets leadership to focus on the Committee’s work being transmitted and moved up the leadership chain for review.

Dr. McFerson stated that he would feel better if the Council were more directly engaged. Dr. McFerson went on to ask if the Council can get a projected date from Dr. Holly Wiggins and Dr. Jacobs-Young? DFO Lewis answered that is a reasonable request and she noted that both Dr. Wiggins and Dr. Jacobs-Young are out of the office this week.

Dr. David Butruille asked if the report can be placed on the NGRAC website? DFO Lewis said she is not able to do that without following a chain of command. Dr. David Butruille also suggested that all the Chairs send a memorandum and report to the Secretary because its not just the NGRAC report that is stuck, all of the other boards and committees are stuck in the same situation he clearly noted.

Dr. Terrance Tiersch also suggested that maybe we could send the report through a memorandum? DFO Lewis answered that she does not have a chain of command.

Dr. McFerson noted that the Council has a response from Dr. Wiggins’s office and that they are just sitting on the reports. Dr. McFerson happily volunteered to draft a memo from himself and Dr. Edmund Buckner as the Chair of CDS and send it to Dr. Wiggins and Dr. Jacobs-Young.

Dr. Paul Gepts made a motion that Dr. McFerson to send a memorandum to the Secretary and the relevant people that documents preparation of the NGRAC report in response to the 2018 Farm Bill.

Dr. Tiersch stated that it’s not only an NGRAC report issue because none of the Boards and Committee’s work has moved forward.



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Dr. Gepts went on to state that that this is a directive on the Farm Bill and questioned the state of the USDA and if they value the stakeholder input? And, that he is not understanding what the USDA is doing as an organization when it doesn't value of stakeholder input.

Dr. Smith stated they have a strong justification that this was a directive on the Farm Bill and it's important that the Council fulfilled the request to give a report.

Motion – Dr. McFerson as a chair to connect to the other chair to send a memorandum of transmission of the report and the evaluation of NGRAC to the Secretary. Dr. Sarada Krishnan seconded the motion and the motion carried – unanimous support was obtained.

Dr. McFerson will circulate a draft around to the Council and will make sure not to put DFO Lewis's position in peril.

V. Remarks from the NGRAC Chair (Jim McFerson)

Dr. McFerson had no remarks and turned over the meeting to Dr. Stephen Kresovich for his updates on the DivSeek International Network Inc.

VI. A Few Remarks about the DivSeek International Network Inc – Steve recently elected as chair of Board of Directors

DivSeek International Network Inc was founded about a decade ago and the idea was to put together a global group to advance plant genetic resources, conservation, and utilization. In the last 5-6 years there has been controversy regarding DivSeek and the role that FAO Treaty and the perception that DivSeek is not an honest broker of information. DivSeek are trying to reestablish their efforts on conservation.

Dr. McFerson asked "is there're much interest in anything other than crop plants? And to a large extent would it include crop wild relatives?" Dr. Kresovich answered that not at this time and that it would include crop wild relatives.

Dr. Butruille asked what is the suspicion that DivSeek was not an honest broker? Dr. Kresovich answered that there was a perception driven by activities in countries with more advanced research systems and close contact with the private sector. Dr. Bretting also answered that it was more perception that the private sector can find any overlap where scientists may cooperate with their agenda.

Dr. Gepts commented that DivSeek has had a chilling effect on germ plasm activities and certain people sought out information using the Freedom of Information Act laws and he himself was asked to present e-mails and they were reviewed by lawyers on his campus.



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VII. Continued discussion on proposed, upcoming face-to-face meeting – strategy and logistics

Dr. McFerson stated that they have two meetings scheduled one in November. Dr. Smith suggested that we have a joint meeting with the NAREEE Board. The intended meeting time is February.

Dr. McFerson is going to put together a strawman with meeting topics and send it around with a target of date of February or March of 2023 (hopefully will be able to do a joint meeting with the NAREEE Board meeting). DFO Lewis recommends that the Council move forward on this path of a suggested meeting time and place, and she will support it.

Dr. Bretting said that in the past the NGRAC has met in Kansas City. Dr. Kresovich suggested meeting in a place where they could learn and meeting by themselves is more advantageous. Dr. McFerson agreed and other members suggested Denver.

VIII. Final remarks and adjourn

DFO Lewis suggested that the Council continue to work independently and get their meeting scheduled. The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.