Mr Chair

We thank you and your team for continuing the important work of the BWC in these unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly focused the world’s attention on the need to respond effectively and decisively to biological threats. Supporting institutional strengthening within the BWC will ensure that the Convention remains relevant and responsive in this context. Universalisation of the BWC is also important to promote the objectives of the Convention. This is why Australia continues to engage with non-signatories to encourage them to ratify and implement the BWC.

Mr Chair

Australia was pleased that the 2020 Meetings of Experts (“MXs”) were able to take place in August and September this year. We continue to engage actively in the intersessional program and we thank each of the chairs of the MXs for their input and leadership. The MXs provide a useful opportunity for experts to network and share information. We will continue to work with other Member State to progress practical ideas that will build international capacity.

A fit-for-purpose database and a process to review scientific and technological developments are two worthy priorities. With rapid developments in biotechnology we need to be able review and adopt the science available to us. As such, we encourage States Parties to agree on methods to conduct regular science and technology reviews relevant to the BWC.

We are also pleased to see gender diversity attracting increasing attention in the BWC – both in terms of levels of participation, as well as understanding gendered impacts and analysis. In this regard, we welcome the initiative presented by Panama at the MXs on enhancing gender equality in the BWC. We are encouraged by the widespread support the paper
received which demonstrates that States Parties recognise the institutional strength that diversity delivers.

An effective intersessional process must however be funded properly. While some progress has been made since the adoption of new financial measures to support the long-term financial health of the BWC, the only genuine solution to the budget problem is for all State Parties to pay their annual contribution on time and in full, including any arrears. Australia continues to call for strong measures to address non-payment.

Mr Chair

Australia believes that for the BWC to be effective cooperation and coordination with health security initiatives is key, including those developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australia’s Health Security Initiative for the Indo-Pacific region is one example of a successful ongoing program that supports both Article VII and Article X objectives through international cooperation for peaceful purposes. Its goal is to contribute to the avoidance and containment of infectious disease threats with the potential to cause social and economic harms on a national, regional or global scale. Australia has responded to requests from partner governments for COVID-19 diagnostic laboratory support, personal protective equipment and national response planning. In addition, we are supporting partner governments to ensure access to safe, effective and affordable COVID-19 vaccines in the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

Australia is also among many countries that support the role of UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism (UNSGM) in investigating the alleged use of biological weapons. We continue to work with UNODA and other member states to strengthen the mechanism’s operational capacity. As a crucial component of the non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, it is vital that the UNSGM remains independent and responsive.

Mr Chair

COVID-19 has exposed global vulnerabilities in relation to biological threats and highlighted the importance of the work we do within the BWC framework. In this context, it is critical
that we take the opportunity presented by the Review Conference next year to progress and strengthen the BWC. We encourage all States Parties to work cooperatively and creatively to this end. The international community expects us to work together to achieve our common interests in strengthening the norm against biological weapons and to cooperate on ways to achieve that goal.

Thank you Chair.