Mr Chair

We thank you and your team for your solid efforts in driving the BWC agenda this year, including the focus on improving the financial position of the Convention.

Australia extends a warm welcome to the delegation of the United Republic of Tanzania, the newest State Party to the Convention. Universalisation of the BWC is important, which is why we were pleased to support a universalisation workshop in Nadi last December focused on supporting Pacific Island countries to ratify and implement the BWC.

Mr Chair

Australia continued to engage actively in the intersessional program in August, and we thank each of the chairs of the experts meetings (“MXs”) for their input and leadership. Our Australian expert (Dr Michelle Baker from the Australian Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security) delivered two presentations – an update on our Health Security Initiative and a technical presentation on gene editing – and participated in the valuable tabletop exercise facilitated by our French colleagues on responding to a deliberate international biological incident.

The MXs continue to provide a useful opportunity for experts to network and share information, but our challenge remains to find ways to take forward some of the practical ideas to strengthen cooperation on biological threats.
Mr Chair

We also need to recognise that an effective intersessional process needs to be funded. 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 each and every State Party to pay its 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 the effectiveness of the BWC is strengthened with other frameworks through better coordination with health security initiatives.

Australia was a major sponsor of the Global Health Security Conference held in Sydney in June 2019 where issues relevant to the BWC were discussed and gender was elevated as a critical consideration in health security.

We were pleased to participate in the Conference on Global Biosecurity Challenges hosted by Russia in Sochi in June 2019, and welcomed the focus on practical ways to strengthen the BWC.

We are 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. It is encouraging to see many female delegates here this week, as well as presenting during the experts meetings in August. We need to keep working to improve the diversity of the voices in this room, and the composition of our delegations, as well as mentoring and encouraging young scientists to take interest in the security dimensions of their work.

Mr Chair

Australia supports the UN Secretary-General’s Disarmament Agenda, specifically Action 10 on the readiness to investigate alleged use of biological weapons. Interest
in the UN Secretary-General’s Mechanism (UNSGM) is growing – evidenced by the side events in the margins of this year’s meeting of states parties. Australia continues to work with the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and other UN Member States to strengthen the Mechanism’s operational capability.

Australia encourages all States Parties to focus on substance and work cooperatively during this meeting of states parties as we prepare for the Review Conference in 2021.

Let’s work together to advocate our common interests in the strong norm against biological weapons and effective cooperation to strengthen that norm.

Let’s focus on what we can achieve rather than areas where consensus won’t be possible.

Thank you.