

**Subject:** Re: CBD online forum update

**From:** Piet van der Meer <pietvandermeer@gmail.com>

**Date:** 7/24/2017 8:31 AM

**To:** Benjamin Robinson <Ben@emergingag.com>

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Dear Ben,

Thanks for this update and the previous updates. Very reassuring to know that someone is following this closely.

This morning I posted a contribution to the debate, which was mostly aimed at helping to get the debate focused again, because the whole debate is - again - all over the place.

As you will see, I addressed several of the issues you listed.

Yet, I am keen to make some additional observations to this group.

1) I supported Fred Gould's point that for the assessment of potential effects we primarily look at the characteristics of the resulting organism and not the process through which it acquired the genetic material responsible for the expression of a new phenotype.

However, I advise to keep that debate focused on risk assessment, and not bring in that discussion the debate about regulatory triggers, i.e. the old "process vs product based" discussion, in part because it confuses the already muddy debate and in part because the whole "process vs product" debate is a non-issue, because the vast majority of regulations are 'novelty based' and not process based. There are very, very few regulations that come close to really being process based, such as the USDA and EPA regulations.

2) I very much agree that the debate has been too much about risks and not enough about benefits.

However, a word of caution about statements suggesting that both risks and benefits should be assessed, because in the past that has quickly been interpreted that in order to get a regulatory approval, you need to provide evidence of the benefits.

3) Very much agree that we need concrete examples of the use of synthetic products potentially resulting in significant benefits. FYI: We are currently trying to mobilise a group of SynBio students to also parttake in this discussion.

Cheers

Piet

On 20 July 2017 at 18:04, Benjamin Robinson <[Ben@emergingag.com](mailto:Ben@emergingag.com)> wrote:

Hi all,

There has so far been relatively little activity on topic 2 relative to topic 1. Definitional debates continue as to what constitutes a synthbio organism, and on whether the concept of “information” can be included in the AHTEG’s definition of synthbio.

### Points you may wish to address:

- Fred Gould, North Carolina State University: <https://bch.cbd.int/synbio/open-ended/discussion/?threadid=8598#8617>
  - Asserts that with regards to the objectives of the CBD, it is an organism’s phenotype that is relevant for the assessment of potential benefits and risks (environmental or otherwise), rather than the exact process through which it acquired the genetic material responsible for the expression of that phenotype.
    - **It might be good for those well-versed in regulatory issues to support this. If necessary, contributors could draw on the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology’s report on “regulation of synthetic biology”, which deals with this issue in more detail. The report can be found here: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/POST-PN-0497#fullreport>**
- Jaco Westra, RIVM: <https://bch.cbd.int/synbio/open-ended/discussion/?threadid=8598#8628>
  - Emphasizes once again the importance of taking a case-by-case approach to risk and benefit assessment
- Lazaro Regalado, Cuba: <https://bch.cbd.int/synbio/open-ended/discussion/?threadid=8598#8621>
  - Highlights the importance of research for assessment, but focuses exclusively on risks
    - **Respondents may wish to mention that both risks and benefits should be assessed in order to effectively regulate new synthbio applications.**
- Jeshima K. Yasin, India: <https://bch.cbd.int/synbio/open-ended/discussion/?threadid=8598#8629>
  - Disputes the claim that the risks of LMOs are not wildly different from those of non-LMOs, using the hypothetical example of a GM crop carrying a sterility gene which may then be spread throughout the non-GM population, leading to its extinction.

### Suggested Actions:

- In order to avoid the topic spiralling into unproductive back-and-forths over definition, it may

be good for those who have so far been less active on the forum to jump in. Concrete examples of the use of synthetic products resulting in significant benefits would be particularly helpful. As the purpose of Topic 2 is to collect evidence, it is important that contributions include links to supporting publications and data where applicable.

Regards,

Ben



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**CBD Online Forum on Synthetic Biology will take place soon!** Experts should [register online](#) to participate.

Contact us if you require assistance.

Supporter of the Manyinga orphan schools project – find out more at [www.manyinga.org](http://www.manyinga.org)