

Explanation of the OECD's Working Party on Biotechnology

What is the OECD?

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an intergovernmental organisation with 30 member countries¹. Its principal aim is to promote policies for sustainable economic growth and employment, a rising standard of living, and trade liberalisation. An increasing number of non-member participate in a wide range of activities, including some of those related to biotechnology. The OECD provides a forum where the governments of advanced industrial democracies compare policy experiences, seek answers to common economic and social policy problems, identify best practices and work to coordinate domestic and international policies.

The Council of OECD is the highest decision-making body of the Organisation. Its members are the Ambassadors of the Member countries to OECD and it is chaired by OECD's Secretary-General. In addition to the Council, there are around 200 specialised Committees and other bodies (including Working Parties, Working Groups and Task Forces), which undertake the Organisation's programme of work. The governments of the Member countries nominate the participants to all these groups.

For more info see: www.oecd.org.

The OECD Working Party on Biotechnology

The Working Party on Biotechnology (WPB) develops policy advice on issues of science, research, technology and innovation related to biotechnology. The objective of the WPB is to assist the development, application and diffusion of innovative products, processes, infrastructure and services which contribute to sustainable economic growth, development and human welfare. It also advises on how innovation in the biosciences can contribute to addressing global challenges such as environmental degradation, food and water security, and global health.

The WPB convenes policy makers who deal with biotechnology related issues in a variety of ministries such as research, education, industry, health, as well as in public research organisations. Recently the WPB has focused its work on (a) industrial biotechnology, eco-innovation and green growth; (b) biomedicine and health innovation (e.g., genomics, pharmacogenetics, biomarkers); (c) on infrastructures for the management of biological resources, genetic databases and biobanks; (d) on improving access and exchange of information and knowledge in the life sciences; and (e) on developing indicators for the bio-economy.

The WPB encourages the international exchange and harmonisation of science-based policies, principles and concepts; it promotes understanding of the scientific, technical and industrial applications of biotechnology and their economic and social impacts; it facilitates scientific and technological co-operation, capacity-building and exchange; and it encourages debate with society including by promoting education and the public understanding of the opportunities and risks associated with advances in biotechnology. The WPB has two subsidiary bodies: the Task Force on Industrial Biotechnology and the Task Force on Biomedicine and Health Innovation.

Other OECD committees, not covered in this survey, have work related to biotechnology, including most notably: Committee for Agriculture; the Environment Policy Committee (through its

¹ OECD member countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Commission also takes part in the work of the OECD.

Working Group on Economic Aspects of Biodiversity) and the Joint Meeting of the Chemicals Committee and the Working Party on Chemicals, Pesticides and Biotechnology.

For more info see: www.oecd.org/biotechnology.

Recent and upcoming WPB conferences

- Expert meetings on Human Biobanks and Genetic Research Databases, 2007-2008
- High Level Forum on Neglected and Emerging Infectious Diseases, Noordwijk-aan-Zee, NL, 7/07
- Joint OECD-IAVI workshop on Policies to Incentivise Research into Vaccine Development, Paris, 11/07
- Workshop on the Developing a Global Network of Biological Resource Centres: Networking the Networks, Paris, 12/07
- Workshop on Knowledge Markets in the Life Sciences, Washington DC, 10/08
- Workshop on Policy Issues in the Development and Application of Biomarkers in Health, Hinxton, UK, 10/08
- Joint OECD Workshop with Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Inter Academy Panel on Biosecurity, Beijing, 12/08
- Informal Expert consultation on Environmental Biotechnology R&D for Societal Goods, Paris, 10/08
- Workshop on Scientific and Technological Policy Priorities for Biofuels, Paris, 10/08
- 2 Round-tables on Supply Side Issues of Industrial Biotechnology R&D, Chicago, 4/08 and Brussels, 09/08
- Workshop on Collaborative Mechanisms for IPRs in Biotechnology, Paris, 4-5 05/09.
- Symposium on Policy Implications of Synthetic Biology, with US National Academies of Science and UK Royal Society, Washington DC, 07/09
- Workshop on Best Practices for Assessing the Sustainability of Bio-based Products, Montreal, Canada, 07/09
- Workshop on OECD Outlook on Industrial Biotechnology, Vienna, Austria, 01/10
- Workshop on Genomics and the Bioeconomy, Mexico City, Mexico 01/10
- Workshop on Environmental Biotechnology Research and Development, 06/10
- Workshop on Risk Assessments Methodologies for Dangerous Pathogens, Autumn 2010
- Workshop on Biotechnology Policy in Emerging and Transition Economies, Autumn 2010

Recent WPB Reports

- *OECD Council Recommendation on the Licensing of Genetic Inventions*, 2006.
- *OECD Council Recommendation on the Quality Assurance in Molecular Genetic Testing* 2007.
- *OECD Best Practice Guidelines on Biological Resource Centres*, 2007
- *OECD Best Practice Guidelines on Biosecurity*, 2007
- Noordwijk Medicines Agenda, 2007

- *Biofuel support policies: An economic assessment*, “Trends in science and innovation,” 2008
- OECD (2009). *Pharmacogenetics: Opportunities and Challenges for Health Innovation*.
- OECD (2009). *Metrics to Support Informed Decision making for Consumers of Bio-based Products*
- OECD (2009). *Coherence for Health: Innovation for New Medicines for Infectious Diseases: The Development Dimension series*.

Forthcoming

- Recommendation on Human Biobanks and Genetic Research Databases
- OECD Policy Report on “Supply Side Issues for Industrial Biotechnology”
- Policy Report on “Personalised Medicines: Exploring the Potential of Biomarkers”
- Policy Report on “Collaborative Mechanisms for Intellectual Property Rights”
- Policy Brief on “New Developments in Health Innovation”
- Policy Report on “Emerging Research Models for Health Innovation”
- Policy Report on “Assessment Methodologies for the Sustainability of Bio-based Products”
- Policy Report on “Knowledge Markets in the Life Sciences”
- Policy Report on “Biosecurity for Innovation in the Life Sciences”