

Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI)

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Summary

This article describes the background, objectives and activities of the Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI) which was established with the aim to offer public researchers involved in modern biotechnology a forum through which they are informed about and involved in relevant international discussions, such as the Meetings of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety CPB (MOPs).

Key words: Biotechnology; Public research; Regulations; International agreements.

Introduction

Governments, academia and organisations throughout the world invest considerably in public research in modern biotechnology to strengthen the sustainable production of food, feed and fibre, to address water shortage, to improve health care and environmental protection. The extent to which modern biotechnology will be able to contribute to these goals depends on, among other things, the regulations that apply. National regulations are strongly influenced by international agreements, such as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB). During the development of these international agreements, the public research sector, which counts tens of thousands researchers in several thousand research institutes in developing and developed countries, has until 2004 not been represented in an organised way.

PRRI

In 2004, the Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI) was established with the objective to offer public researchers involved in modern biotechnology a forum through which they are informed about and involved in relevant international discussions, such as the Meetings of the Parties to the CPB, Meeting Of the Parties (MOPs). Goal of participation in such meetings is to inform the negotiators about the objectives and results of public research in modern biotechnology, to bring science to the negotiations, and to inform the negotiators about concerns that public researchers may have. PRRI participated in MOP2 and MOP3, as well as in the 8th Conference of the Parties (COP8) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), with many public research scientists from all over the world. Since its establishment, PRRI has become a well-recognised organisation in the international arena.

Organisation and Funding

The heart of this initiative is the PRRI Forum, which connects public researchers who wish to be informed about relevant developments and actively involved in the activi-

ties of PRRI. Public researchers involved in modern biotechnology are welcome to register as a Forum member, so that they can be informed about new developments. Registration is free of cost and can be done in a few minutes through the PRRI website.

PRRI is coordinated by a Steering Committee of public researchers from all corners of the world, and a foundation has been established for the organisation's financing. The day-to-day activities and communications are handled by the PRRI Secretariat.

PRRI has established working groups to discuss specific topics such as *Updates on Public Research, Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, Aarhus Convention, Liability, Risk Assessment, GURTs, GM Trees*, etc. Information is also provided in French, Russian, Spanish, and Arabic.

Financial support has been provided by governments, international organisations and the private sector. The European Commission has funded a 3-year project, called Science4BioReg, which allows PRRI to conduct some of its basic activities in the period 2006-2009.

Main activities planned in 2007 and 2008

PRRI's main activities for 2007-2008 are to prepare for participation in MOP4 and COP9, which will be held back to back from 12-30 May in Bonn, Germany.

For this purpose, PRRI will organise regional preparatory meetings to introduce public researchers to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Convention on Biological Diversity and to seek their input on the topics on the agenda. Topics of MOP4 that are relevant for public researchers are: Liability and Redress, Risk Assessment and Risk Management, Biosafety Clearing House (BCH), Roster of experts, Capacity building, Handling, Packaging and Use, Socio-economic Considerations in Decision Making, Public Participation and Review of the functioning of the Protocol. Topics of COP9 that are relevant for public researchers in modern biotechnology are: GM Trees, GURTs, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS), Technology Transfer and Agricultural Biodiversity.

The PRRI regional preparatory meetings are to the extent possible co-organised with regional organisations and in conjunction with existing meetings. The following PRRI regional preparatory meetings were organised:

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- *Africa*, in collaboration with Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and AfricaBio in conjunction with FARA's Africa Agricultural Science Week (date: June 11, 2007, Johannesburg, South Africa).
- *Western Europe*: in collaboration with the European Federation for Biotechnology (EFB) and in conjunction with the 13th European Conference on Biotechnology (date: 17 September 2007, Barcelona, Spain).
- *North America*, in conjunction with the international symposium Translational Seed Biology: From Model Systems to Crop Improvement (date: 17 September 2007, Davis, California).
- *Latin America*: in collaboration with ANBio and in conjunction with the V biosafety congress + Latin American Symposium on Transgenic Products , (date: 21 September, Belo Horizonte, Brazil).

The following PRRI preparatory meetings are under discussion:

- Eastern Europe and Middle East: possibly in Istanbul Early 2008
- South East Asia: collaboration with IRRI and APEC.
- Global: in conjunction with Biovision Alexandria, 12-16 April 2008, in Alexandria, Egypt.

PRRI has participated or will participate in relevant intersessional meetings of the CPB and CBD, such as:

- 3th Coordination Meeting for Governments and Organizations implementing and/or funding Biosafety Capacity-building Activities, and the Fourth meeting of the Liaison Group on Capacity-building for Biosafety, 26 February -2 March 2007, Lusaka, Zambia.
- 2nd International Meeting of Academic Institutions

and Organizations Involved in Biosafety Education and Training, 16-18 April 2007, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

- Canada Norway Expert Workshop on Risk Assessment for Future Applications of Modern Biotechnology, 4-6 June Montreal, Canada
- 12th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, 2-6 July 2007- UNESCO, Paris, France.
- 4th meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group of Legal and Technical Experts on Liability and Redress in the context of the Protocol, 22-26 October 2007, Montreal, Canada
- 6th meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing (ABSWG-6), 21-25 January 2008, Geneva, Switzerland.
- 13th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, 16-22 February, Rome Italy.

All the statements and submissions prepared for these meetings by PRRI are included on the PRRI website: www.pubresreg.org.

In addition to participating in international negotiations, PRRI will continue to inform governments, organisations and other stakeholders about the ongoing public research in modern biotechnology and about any concerns about regulatory developments that PRRI members may have. Letters that PRRI has sent in this respect are published on the PRRI web site. On the PRRI web site is recently also a page Ask-Force added, on PRRI publishes frequently asked questions and issues that refer to publications that are either not supported by properly peer reviewed scientific research, and publications that contain wrong statements.

مبادرة بحوث القطاع العام واللوائح في مجال التقانات الحيوية

بيت فان دير مير¹

الخلاصة

تُعنى المقالة بعرض الخلفية والأهداف وأوجه نشاط بحوث القطاع العام واللوائح التي أُنشئت بهدف توفير منبر للباحثين العاملين في مجال التقانة الحيوية الحديثة كما يهدف المنبر إلى إتاحة الفرصة للمشاركة في المناقشات العالمية ذات الصلة مثل الاجتماعات والمؤتمرات الدولية وأصبح هذا المنبر تنظيماً مُعترفً به في الساحة العالمية منذ إنشائه في عام 2004.

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