EFB Environmental Biotechnology Division

Meeting of the Division Board held online (ZOOM) on Wednesday, 4^{th} September 2024 at 17:00 CET.

Present: JSG (Chair), JC, DR, JP, MH, RM, SV

1. Apologies for absence and welcome.
JSG welcomed all present and informed the Board that apologies for absence were received from MS and MWK.

2. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting not covered below.
No other matters were raised for discussion.

3. Thematic issue of the Bioeconomy Journal.
After confirmation with the Bioeconomy Journal Editor-in-Chief, JC informed the Board that the number of submissions to the Thematic issue was disappointingly low. The reasoning is likely linked to the Journal newness and consequent current impact perception by the community. Further discussions in this regard with the publisher will be held in the upcoming months.

4. EB Division support to the online meeting "Biotechnology in extreme environments".
The possibility of organizing an online meeting covering biotechnology in extreme environments was presented to the Board, and was well received. The need to pitch the meeting appropriately while disseminating it was highlighted, so that the audience does not identify the meeting with Space biotechnological research only, a field where very few people work. Many extreme environments can be covered, such as polar regions, extremely contaminated environmental compartments (e.g., industrial soils, mining areas), deep sea, wildfire affected areas. It was agreed that the EB Division would likely be the most appropriate to coordinate the meeting, to favour scope enlargement that counteracts the restriction to extreme environments. Nevertheless, the support by other EFB Divisions was recognised as very important to promote the impact and attendance of the meeting. The Board agreed that the interest in collaborating should be assessed with the Plant, Agriculture and Food Division, the Microbial Biotechnology Division and the Bioengineering and Bioprocessing Division. A first discussion on the need to designate Committee members from the EB Division was made, and the Board agreed that people heavily involved already in other meetings should be exempted from this responsibility. However, all Board members expressed their availability to support the designated committee, namely in suggesting invited speakers and session/scope outlining. All Board members were invited to suggest high-profile potential invited speakers for this meeting.
Action: JC and DR will approach Board members of other Divisions to understand their potential interest in co-organizing this online meeting.
Action: JP will send JC a suggestion for a high-profile speaker that can cover Space research.
Action: JSG will suggest speakers that can be invited to cover other extreme environments.

5. Next EFB-EB regular meeting, Aveiro, Spring 2025.
The Board was made aware of the scheduling of the Sustainable Food Biotechnology meeting by the Plant, Agriculture and Food Division to February 2024, also hosted by the University of Aveiro. It was clarified that this meeting was recently proposed and the overall impression is that it should raise additional interest also in the Green Deal Biotechnology meeting, later in May. Concerns were expressed that potential local registrants would likely select one meeting over the other for participation, which can impair both meetings. If this risk materializes, the possibility of offering double registration promotional packages should be discussed.

Regarding organizational aspects, JC clarified that the three documents that are critical for the organization of EFB meetings have been prepared by the Central Office and have been or will soon be distributed to committee members:

(i) Agreement between the Division and the EFB regarding the organization of the meeting (Contract), which received already agreement from JP, SV, JSG and the EFB and will be signed in the upcoming days. No contacts for speaker invitation and sponsoring should be made before completing Contract signatures. JSG will sign on behalf of the Division.

(ii) Calendar for the organization of the meeting, a guidance document that has some flexibility until April 2024.

(iii) Budget, which is a key document to plan and manage the costs of the meeting, assess the possibilities in terms of lowering the registration fees while keeping the bottom line null or potentiate the generation of a surplus, which is highly desirable for the Division.

Insurance against liability was highlight as an issue needing attention. It was remarked that if the host has no such insurance, the item must be included in the budget.

Action: JC will distribute the Calendar and the Budget to organizers for revision and improvement suggestions.

Action: JP and SV will inquiry the University of Aveiro regarding insurance availability for the meeting participants.

Final agreements were made on the scope of the meeting, which should be fully ready as soon as possible so that contacts with speakers and sponsors can be properly contextualized. The Committee agreed in eliminating the topic on industrial symbiosis considering its current low maturity level and the possibility of integrating in another topic of the programme. This elimination opens the space for the organization of a session by ACIB, which is a possibility that will be confirmed by RM after the ACIB meeting in November. It was agreed that the description of the topics will be fully ready in the next two weeks.

Action: All committee members will revise the description of the topics to finish the scope of the meeting within the next two weeks.

The collated list of suggestions for the invitation of keynote speakers was briefly addressed. As there are several suggestions per topic, a rank must be made so that speakers are invited sequentially according to the committee preferences. Formal invitation letters signed by JSG, JP and SV should be sent out after a first contact by the member of the committee with closer connection with the speaker when applicable. Invited speakers will be offered free registration in the meeting.

Action: The responsible persons for each topic of the programme will meet to rank the suggested speakers until the end of September and suggest the person making the first contact when applicable, notifying JP when the ranking is closed.

The critical importance of sponsoring for budget sustainability was reinforced, and the contacts with potential sponsors should start as soon as the Contract is signed and the description of the programme topics is finished. Contacts with potential sponsors should be made by the committee members, and upon agreement, the Central Office will follow-up to discuss details and formalities. The shared spreadsheet regarding sponsoring should be kept update following these contacts for the best efficiency of the process, which is coordinated by SV.

Action: All committee members will update the shared spreadsheet concerning sponsoring with possible sponsors and, if applicable (privileged connection) indicate who will make the first contact.

6. Membership of the Division Board

The current differential level of engagement of Board members in the Division activities and meetings was briefly addressed. JSG and JC were delegated a more supported analysis of engagement levels to be done until the end of the year, which should support further membership replacement decisions.

7. Any other business.

No other specific businesses were raised for discussion.

8. Scheduling of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Board was tentatively scheduled for the period between 14 and 25 of October 2024, on Tuesdays, Thursdays or Fridays, by 17:00 CET.

Action: JP will circulate a poll in the last half of September to find the most suitable day of the week proposed for the Board meeting.

JP. 11 September 2024