

## **EFB Environmental Biotechnology Division**

Meeting of the Division Board held online (ZOOM platform) on Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 5:00 PM CET.

Present: JSG (Chair), JC (Co-chair), DS, JP, MH, MS, MV, MWK, RM, SV.

### **1. Apologies for absence and welcome to all and to new Board members**

Apologies for absence were not received until the beginning of the meeting, although apologies from CM and LC were received afterwards.

### **2. Brief self-presentation of new members to the Board**

RM briefly introduced her current work in the Austrian Centre of Industrial Biotechnology (ACIB), in line with her expertise in cyanobacteria extracellular polymeric substances and their biotechnological applications. MS introduced her main field of research at the University of Ghent, Belgium, in developing biotechnological applications for microalgae with focus on agricultural streams and protein production. MH highlighted that her research focus, as an environmental microbiologist at the University of Warmia and Mazury, Poland, is mainly on antibiotic resistance bacteria and genes, particularly in municipal and healthcare wastewater.

### **3. Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting not covered below**

No additional matters were identified by Board members.

### **4. Green Deal Biotechnology meeting (Nov 2023, Poznan)**

The meeting was well attended: 61 participants from 14 countries, 8 keynotes, 26 short-talks, 17 posters. Among the several sessions organised, the most participated was that focusing on resources recovery, which was not a surprise considering the current research trends. The good to very good quality of the invited talks, as well as the excellence of keynotes was highlighted. It was also remarked by all Board members attending the conference that the engagement level was high, with discussions being very well participated and informal interactions in the well-tuned venue dimensions being truly stimulated. The logistics and overall local organization were commended. Aspects that can be improved in next meetings included: improve the indications for the exact location of the venue; consider increasing round tables on broader topics, similarly to what was done with the session dedicated to the European policy for the circular bioeconomy, food security and the environment; keep also the possibility of organising these kinds of sessions but in a breakout format with a more specific focus to join participants with closer interests.

A special acknowledgement was made to JSG and MWK for the successful organisation, both concerning the scientific programme and the logistics and local technical support. The foundation for a very interesting community around the Environmental Biotechnology Division was laid, which should be continuously fed and greatly precedes forthcoming activities.

Financially, the meeting was balanced and within the EFB expectations, although not covering for Office staff effort.

### **5. Thematic issue of the Bioeconomy Journal**

The interest in submissions to the Bioeconomy Journal is still short, with the Central Office collecting so far eight expressions of interest. Indeed, it is clear that New Biotechnology has a much higher attraction potential due to its reputation and surely high impact factor. As a young Journal, the EFB Bioeconomy Journal did not reach these attraction levels, but there are advantages to argue towards the promotion of submissions to the thematic issue therein, e.g., fees exemption; transference between the two Journals in both directions possible; extra support by the Editorial Board.

An appeal was made to the Board by the Chairs towards considering submission to the Thematic Issue in the Bioeconomy Journal. The nominal deadline is the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024, yet there is some flexibility.

**Action:** DS will interact with Ewa at the Central Office, as well as with the remaining Thematic Issue Editors, for sending personal invitation letters to speakers of selected talks in the Green Deal Biotechnology meeting.

## **6. EB Board participation and contribution to the ECB**

Under the theme “Grand Challenges for Biotechnology: Health; Food Security; and Global Warming”, the ECB programme organization is progressing very well. Four very high-profile plenary speakers have confirmed their participation. Sixty people from both academia and industry have been invited to give Keynote Lectures in the 30 symposia. To date, 37 of the 60 have accepted their invitations. Board members were asked to encourage their colleagues to submit abstracts for some of the 114 available short oral presentations that will be selected from abstracts submitted by registrants.

## **7. Regular activities of the EB Division and activities for 2024.**

The possibility of inviting selected speakers to produce talk summaries that can be highlighted by the Division in the website was discussed. The creation of a specific section in the website for the purpose has been considered but there are associated costs, especially if a relevant increase in storage capacity is necessary.

**Action:** JC will discuss the new website section possibility and the linked cost with the Office.

Considering the need to promote ECB, the organisation of a webinar/training to young researchers during Spring 2024 as suggested in previous meetings was postponed. Instead, the best efforts will be put in the organisation of a meeting focusing on plastics in the environment, jointly with other EFB Divisions. This 1-day low-cost meeting will be held online, tentatively in March 20<sup>th</sup> 2024. It should include 4 sessions of less than two hours, each with two or three “live” keynote speakers, followed by Q&A, and selected short talks. Sessions will tentatively cover the design of new biobased materials, enzyme engineering to enhance production and biodegradation, the problems of plastics dumped in the environment, and plastic recycling. The influence of microplastics present in waste streams on the efficiency of waste processing for e.g. resource and energy recovery was suggested as an interesting topic that could potentially be covered.

**Action:** Within the next two to three weeks, Board members should send to the Chairs suggestions of potential speakers for the plastics meeting, as well as nominations of volunteers to work in the organization with JC and the Central Office.

No updates were available on the possibility of cooperation with ongoing COST Actions in organization of meetings as raised before. All communication regarding the contacts received and future organisational requests was directed to the Central Office.

## **8. Next EFB-EB regular meeting following Green Deal Biotechnology**

The Board agreed with the organization of the next EB Division meeting in Aveiro, Portugal, during Spring 2025. March, preferably, and June were discussed as suitable months for the scheduling of the meeting, considering typical schedules of major meetings in Europe that can a priori impair attendance rates. JP and SV will onset the process within the University of Aveiro to ensure the best conditions for the meeting. An attendance at least similar to that achieved in the Poznan meeting is the baseline goal, and this benchmark will be used for a reasonable budget development with the Central Office. Under this scenario, it should be possible to liberate up to 12 free registrations and support two or three very high-profile speakers. Still, expectations towards increased attendance are high. The possibility of applying to a FEMS grant to support the organization of the meeting was discussed, but based on the typical success rates and the differential organisational policy of the EFB and FEMS, it was discarded. Efforts should rather be directed to gathering sponsorship.

First organisational steps to be taken in the upcoming months are: (i) confirmation the overall conditions at the University of Aveiro for hosting the meeting, as well as the available institutional support; (ii) verification of the provisional dates for major meetings in Europe and meetings from other Divisions (e.g. Plant, Agriculture & Food Division) before establishing the final dates to avoid unnecessary clashing; (iii) reasoning of the motto of the meeting and drawing of a preliminary proposal for the meeting structure considering the recommendations yield from the Poznan meeting; (iv) establishing the Scientific committee jointly with the Chairs

#### **9. Any other business**

No other businesses were raised for discussion.

#### **10. Scheduling of the next meeting**

The next EB Division Board meeting was scheduled to the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024 at 17:00 CET.

**Action:** JP will schedule the online meeting and circulate the Agenda in due time.

**JP. 29 November 2023**