

EFB Environmental Biotechnology Division

Minutes of an online meeting of the Division Board held Wednesday, 8 July 2026

In attendance:

- Joanna Surmacz-Gorska (Co-Chair)
- Joana Pereira (Co-Chair)
- Marcella Fernandes de Souza
- Rita Mota
- David Richardson
- Anna Parus
- Mauro Di Fenza

Apologies:

- Monika Harnisz (connectivity problems due to strong winds in northern Poland)
- Agnieszka Kuźniar (same connectivity problems)
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1. Apologies and Welcome

Joanna opened the meeting and welcomed all participants. Apologies were noted from Monika, who was unable to connect due to strong winds affecting northern Poland, and from Agnieszka, who experienced the same connectivity problems. It was noted that Marta and Sónia would each be possibly joining later in the meeting.

2. Matters Arising from Previous Minutes

No matters arising from the previous minutes were reported.

3. Green Deal Biotechnology Conference – Update and Planning

Marcella reported on her site visit to the venue in Ghent, sharing photographs of the main hall and the corridor and downstairs area earmarked for the poster session, sponsor tables and registration desk. While the shared spaces are not ideal, the Board agreed the layout would work well once furniture and boards are positioned appropriately. Marcella confirmed that poster boards can be borrowed free of charge from the Ghent University. A formal quotation from the venue, covering catering, coffee breaks and the reception, is still outstanding, but the event dates have already been secured.

The Board reviewed access permissions to the shared Google Drive folder and agreed to create a dedicated sub-folder collecting materials from the previous conference (including session descriptions and the budget spreadsheet) to serve as a starting point for the new edition.

Session leads were assigned informally during the meeting based on members' expertise and interests, covering topics including wastewater treatment solutions, monitoring/modelling and simulation, bio-based carbon capture and utilisation, sustainable agriculture and soil health, circular economy and waste valorisation, and biotechnological valorisation of marine resources (round table format).

Action: The Board agreed to:

1. each draft a short paragraph describing their session for the conference website and call for abstracts, to be compiled and reviewed collectively
2. provide a first draft of the programme structure by mid-August, circulate it for comment, and forward it to the EFB Office by the start of September for publication

3. Marcella will also follow up with the EFB Office for a list of potential Belgian sponsor companies, noting it will be easier to approach companies once the website is live.

Feedback relayed from the EFB Executive Board meeting indicated that industry stakeholders often perceive conference programmes as too academic, limiting sponsorship interest. The Board discussed ways to increase industry engagement, including inviting industry keynote speakers, and expanding the round table into a dedicated pitching session open to both companies and applied-research groups, modelled on the well-received "industrial voice" pitching format used by the Proteinn Club at the recent Congress.

On the budget, David reported that the Federation's finances were not materially affected by the recent Congress, and that the Division's allocated budget of approximately €9,500 remains available, though final confirmation is pending the EFB Office's return from its post-Congress break. The Board agreed that the budget should not be used to reduce registration fees upfront, but could later be offered as targeted support (e.g. scholarships or grants) for early-career researchers presenting accepted abstracts.

Marcella will begin adapting the spreadsheet used for the previous conference to model registration income based on an estimated 120 participants, before incorporating EFB Office overheads once available. A possible small grant from the Flemish Institute for Research was also noted as worth pursuing.

Action: Marcella will set up a shared conference folder (including a sub-folder with materials from the last edition) and adapt the previous budget spreadsheet; Board members will each draft a short description for their assigned session; Marcella will follow up with the EFB Office regarding sponsorship contacts and confirmation of the available budget.

4. ECB2026 Congress (Antwerp) – Feedback and Debrief

David, Marcella and Rita shared their impressions of the recent Congress. Attendance across the four parallel streams was uneven: the "Manufacturing with Microbes" stream was very popular, while phytoremediation sessions were comparatively less well attended, reportedly because researchers in that area felt the rest of the programme was not directly relevant to them. Members agreed that with such a broad programme some scheduling conflicts between related topics were unavoidable, though this remains an area to improve for the next edition.

Overall feedback on the organisation, venue, catering and scientific quality was positive, and several members noted strong poster attendance throughout the event. One comment was raised regarding the absence of joint plenary sessions, attributed to the number of parallel streams. The closing lecture on bioelectricity was highlighted as a particularly strong way to end the conference.

Action: the Board agreed to take these observations into account when planning the next edition.

5. Report from the EFB Executive Board and General Assembly Meetings

A summary was given of the recent EFB Executive Board and General Assembly meetings. The Federation's financial report was summarised, noting on the approval of the 2025 budget and plans for the coming year.

It was reported that Ivo Frébort has taken on the role of Federation Treasurer in addition to his role as Vice President, and has accordingly stepped down as Chair of the Agriculture and Food Division, which now has a new chair. A new Vice President of the Federation was also appointed. The next Federation Congress was confirmed to take place in Toulouse in 2028, and discussions are ongoing on how to make the programme more attractive to industry sponsors.

An update was given on the Federation's negotiations with the publisher of New Biotechnology, expected to conclude by the end of the year. It was confirmed that the Division position papers may be submitted to the journal once approved by the EFB Executive Board.

The Board was also reminded of the ongoing effort to encourage institutional membership, including at departmental level where full university-level sign-up proves slow. It was noted that the University of Aveiro has confirmed institutional membership.

Two Executive Board meetings per year (one in person, one online) are planned going forward.

6. Special Issue of New Biotechnology

Monika, though absent, had relayed by email that there is still no response from the Editor-in-Chief regarding an extension to the submission deadline. Several Board members shared direct experience of manuscripts being submitted to the SI.

7. Collaboration with Proteinn Club

The Board noted that it remains unclear whether the Proteinn Club is seeking a specific collaboration with the Environmental Biotechnology Division as opposed to other EFB divisions. Given the strong impression left by the Proteinn Club's industry pitching session at the recent Congress, members agreed it would be worth reopening contact to gauge interest, potentially through a personal contact David has within the organisation, and to explore whether a similar pitching format could be run at the next Green Deal Biotechnology meeting.

Action: Marcella will follow up with the Proteinn Club, referencing the recent Congress session, to explore interest in collaborating on a pitching-style session at the next conference.

8. Any Other Business

No additional items were raised.

9. Scheduling of the Next Meeting

The Board agreed the next meeting should take place in the first week of September. Anna will circulate a scheduling poll in the second half of August. Members agreed that, to keep the process efficient, the poll should remain open for a limited window with the final schedule confirmed within a couple of days of closing, to allow members to commit to other engagements without the risk of their availability changing before the poll closes.

Action: Anna will circulate a scheduling poll for the next Board meeting in the second half of August, kept open for approximately one week.

Joanna thanked all Board members for their work over the academic year and wished everyone a good summer break.