

ISBGMO14

Guadalajara

Mexico

June 7th 2017

Re: A letter from scholars

Dear Klaus and colleagues,

As your letter was marked for my kind attention I am replying personally. My response may not reflect the view of the ISBR Executive Board, of which until last night I was Chairman. Dr Ariel Alvarez, the new President, may wish to respond on his own behalf or on behalf of the Board.

Your point about the inappropriate and misleading tag 'ISBGMO' is well taken. In fact for some time, including our Board meeting on Saturday last, we have been discussing what we should call the meeting, not only because it does not reflect what goes on but also to make more explicit the link between ISBR and its biennial meeting (BMISBR – Biennial meeting of ISBR was one suggestion). As you will see from the exciting range of subjects covered here in Guadalajara the conference is not confined to 'GMOs' and their regulation but considers wider issues in the food and environment arena as well as innovative technologies and approaches. The title of the conference was inherited from a different era (in which some of your signatories were involved) but I agree that does not make it any less misleading and perpetuates an historical division which is no longer acceptable. I am sure the next meeting (in Barcelona) will be retitled.

I believe you know very well why 'so-called GMOs' have been the subject of 'a 40-year sectoral/sectarian watchful attention' whilst other similar products have escaped red tape and over-regulation. From Asilomar onwards responsible scientists recognised the *potential* of organisms produced by recombinant DNA techniques to be harmful or little-understood. It is a matter of history. That their regulation continues to be disproportionate and that a wider view of risk assessment is needed is a matter of much concern to all of us (and has been raised several times at this meeting). I'm not sure accusing the Society of signing up to a 'deceitful GMO fake concept' or perpetuating the 'GMO blunder' is helpful (or even scholarly) language.

For what it's worth my personal view is that, instead of sniping from the sidelines with an ill-timed letter, your cause and that of your signatories would be better served by joining the Society whose mission statement you so clearly admire. Come along, see what a small group of dedicated people can achieve and share the excitement of our huge and successful meetings. Change things from within. Having spent a good deal of my 14-year retirement travelling the World learning and teaching how to apply sound science to Environmental Risk Assessment I do not need or appreciate a lecture on 'Genomic misconception' or any other high-flown intellectual construct.

Yours in science and reason,

Alan

Dr Alan Gray, Past President International Society for Biosafety Research