



New Breeding Techniques and Genetically Modified Organism regulation in South Africa

Thursday, 17 March 2022

BACKGROUND

In 2019, the scope of the South African Genetically Modified Organisms Act 15 of 1997 ('GMO Act'), as amended by Genetically Modified Organisms Act, 2006 (Act No. 23 of 2006), in relation to new breeding techniques or "NBTs" was explored and recommendations were made. NBTs include many now popular, and commonly used tools for genome editing, including clustered regularly-interspersed short palindromic repeats (CRISPR) and the like. Fundamentally, the debate related to whether or not NBTs and products arising from NBTs were subject to the current regulatory system governing genetically modified organisms ("GMOs"). In a public notice published on 27 October 2021, the Executive Council under the GMO Act concluded that the current risk assessment framework that exists for GMOs and products derived from GMOs would also apply to organisms created through NBTs. However, regulation of organisms created through NBTs and characterisation of such organisms or products derived from them, creates difficulties in that since such organisms do not necessarily incorporate genetic material from another organism in their genome, it can be extremely difficult to determine whether organisms were created by conventional breeding or random mutation, or that the organisms were indeed created through NBTs. In this presentation Dr Groenewald will talk us through the present requirements and some of the current discussions relating to this legislation.

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About the speaker:

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Dr Hennie Groenewald is the Executive Manager of Biosafety South Africa, a national service platform that facilitates sustainable bio-innovation. It is the principal instrument within the national biotech innovation system which enables compliant, sustainable, and effective research, development, innovation, and commercialisation. Hennie has >25 years of experience in biotechnology research and development, teaching, biosafety risk analysis and governance, science communication, business development and innovation management in the public, private and academic sectors. Prior to joining Biosafety South Africa, he also worked at Stellenbosch University, the South African Sugarcane Research Institute and North-West University. Hennie is a founding member of two successful South African biotech start-ups and has served on numerous international and national bodies tasked with responsible research and innovation, biosafety, risk

governance, capacity building, medicine regulation, science communication and sustainable biotech- and agricultural innovation.

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