

**2014-08-60 Report from the Special Interest Group on Synthetic Biology:** Fred Bass reported. The report is attached as Appendix 6. Further information on synthetic biology can be found at <http://www.quakerservice.ca/>.

Canadian Yearly Meeting approves the following recommendations from the synthetic biology report:

1. That CYM affirm the seven principles identified in *Principles for the Oversight of Synthetic Biology*,<sup>1</sup> a document that makes many important recommendations, and continue to work with the Biotechnology Reference Group of the Canadian Council of Churches (BRG) on discerning ways to implement the seven principles:
  - I. Employ the Precautionary Principle;
  - II. Require mandatory synthetic biology-specific regulations;
  - III. Protect public health and worker safety;
  - IV. Protect the environment;
  - V. Guarantee the right-to-know and democratic participation;
  - VI. Require corporate accountability and manufacturer liability; and
  - VII. Protect economic and environmental justice.
2. That CYM request that Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), with the help of concerned groups such as the ETC Group<sup>2</sup> and the BRG,<sup>3</sup> provide Canadian Quakers with an annual, easily understandable update on synthetic biology;
3. That CYM request CFSC, and encourage Monthly Meetings, to find opportunities to link with other faith and community groups, and with Indigenous peoples, to share insights and discernment about synthetic biology; and
4. That CYM encourage CFSC and Quaker Meetings in Canada to engage with other faith groups and interested parties, including organizations involved in research and/or manufacture in synthetic biology, to hold and/or participate in conferences that address ethical, spiritual, social, and economic aspects of synthetic biology.

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<sup>1</sup> Published April 2013 by Friends of the Earth, ETC Group, and International Center for Technology Assessment,  
[http://libcloud.s3.amazonaws.com/93/ae/9/2287/2/Principles\\_for\\_the\\_oversight\\_of\\_synthetic\\_biology.pdf](http://libcloud.s3.amazonaws.com/93/ae/9/2287/2/Principles_for_the_oversight_of_synthetic_biology.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC Group) monitors new technology, biodiversity, and the work of certain corporations.

<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Council of Churches intervened at the Supreme Court of Canada in 2002 (on the “Oncomouse case”) which ruled against the patenting of higher forms of life and, in 2012, was one of 100+ organizations signing on to *Principles for the Oversight of Synthetic Biology*.

## **Appendix 6. Report on Synthetic Biology for 2014 Canadian Yearly Meeting prepared by the Canadian Friends Service Committee (QPASC task group for synthetic biology) and seasoned by the Special Interest Group on Synthetic Biology at CYM 2014**

“Given the implications of Friends' testimonies on peace, on simplicity, on equality and on respect for the integrity of Creation, we pledge ourselves to the Precautionary Principle, by which new technology is embraced with great caution. Holistic accounting of impacts, including scientific, moral and ethical accounts may or may not confirm technology's benefits. These things may only be known in the fullness of time.”<sup>4</sup>

Synthetic biology, one such area of new technological development, has rapidly expanded in the past decade, integrating engineering, genetics and computer science to produce new forms of life. It goes beyond the genetic modification of existing species to the manufacture of new ones. The possibilities are far reaching. Synthetic biology could be used to produce medications or replace human organs. Or it could be used to make biological weapons and products that destroy biological diversity.

In 2012, Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) judged that the new field of synthetic biology warrants the attention of Friends. CYM invited Monthly Meetings across Canada to address ethical and spiritual issues of synthetic biology during 2013. Information and support to do this was offered by the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC). CYM would revisit the subject in 2014. Ten monthly meetings in Canada,<sup>5</sup> with the information kit provided by CFSC,<sup>6</sup> formed Study Groups on synthetic biology and applied Quaker testimonies.

We offer these recommendations for consideration at the 2014 Canadian Yearly Meeting:

1. Affirm the seven principles identified in *Principles for the Oversight of Synthetic Biology*,<sup>7</sup> a document that makes many important recommendations, and continue to work with the Biotechnology Reference Group of the Canadian Council of Churches (BRG) on discerning ways to implement the seven principles:

- I. Employ the Precautionary Principle;
- II. Require mandatory synthetic biology-specific regulations;
- III. Protect public health and worker safety;
- IV. Protect the environment;
- V. Guarantee the right-to-know and democratic participation;
- VI. Require corporate accountability and manufacturer liability; and
- VII. Protect economic and environmental justice.

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<sup>4</sup> 2001 Canadian Yearly Meeting minute on Sustainability, <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/CYM-Minutes-on-Sustainability.pdf> (pg 1, Aug 11, 2001)

<sup>5</sup> Reports received from Annapolis Valley, Hamilton, New Brunswick, Ottawa, Montreal, Peterborough, Thousand Islands, Toronto, Vancouver, and Yarmouth Monthly Meetings.

<sup>6</sup> <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2013-CFSC-Synthetic-Biology-Kit.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Published April 2013 by Friends of the Earth, ETC Group, and International Center for Technology Assessment, [http://libcloud.s3.amazonaws.com/93/ae/9/2287/2/Principles\\_for\\_the\\_oversight\\_of\\_synthetic\\_biology.pdf](http://libcloud.s3.amazonaws.com/93/ae/9/2287/2/Principles_for_the_oversight_of_synthetic_biology.pdf)

2. Request that CFSC, with the help of concerned groups such as the ETC Group<sup>8</sup> and the BRG,<sup>9</sup> provide Canadian Quakers with an annual, easily understandable update on synthetic biology;

3. Request that CFSC and Monthly Meetings find opportunities to link with other faith and community groups, and with Indigenous peoples, to share insights and discernment about synthetic biology; and

4. Encourage CFSC and Quaker Meetings in Canada to engage with other faith groups and interested parties, including organizations involved in research and/or manufacture in synthetic biology, to hold and/or participate in conferences that address ethical, spiritual, social, and economic aspects of synthetic biology.

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<sup>8</sup> Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC Group) monitors new technology, biodiversity, and the work of certain corporations.

<sup>9</sup> The Canadian Council of Churches intervened at the Supreme Court of Canada in 2002 (on the “Oncomouse case”) which ruled against the patenting of higher forms of life and, in 2012, was one of 100+ organizations signing on to *Principles for the Oversight of Synthetic Biology*.