

National Biotechnology Advisory Committee

The National Biotechnology Advisory Committee (NBAC) was launched as a sub-committee of the National Advisory Council on Innovation (NACI) at a workshop in Pretoria on 30 November 2006. The formation of a committee to advise the Minister of Science and Technology on an appropriate course for biotechnology in South Africa was one of the recommendations of the National Biotechnology Strategy, approved in 2001.

After a lengthy process of inviting and considering nominations, the members of NBAC were announced at the meeting as follows:

- Prof. Jennifer Thomson (NACI Council representative and Professor of Cell Biology, University of Cape Town)
- Dr Ntuthuko Bhengu (NACI Council representative and Executive Director, Africa Biopharma Investments)
- Dr Gatsha Mazithulela (Executive Director, CSIR Biosciences)
- Prof. Solly Benatar (Professor, Medical Faculty, University of Cape Town) (who could not be present)
- Prof. Mbudzeni Sibara (Professor, IKS and Biochemistry, Tshwane University of Technology)
- Dr Heather Sherwin (Director, Fund Manager, BioVentures)
- Prof Henk Huisman (Professor, Department of Genetics, University of Pretoria)
- Prof Sagadevan Mundree (CEO: PlantBio Biotechnology Regional Innovation Centre).

At the committee meeting immediately after the launch Prof. Jennifer Thomson was elected chairperson of NBAC and Dr Ntuthuko Bhengu deputy chair. NBAC considered and approved a proposal by NACI Exco to co-opt the following additional members to the committee:

- Prof. Michael Pepper (Director, NetCare Institute of Cellular and Molecular Medicine)
- Prof. Jocelyn Webster (Executive Director, AfricaBio).

The guests at the launch included the Honourable Minister of Science and Technology, Mr Mosibudi Mangena; Mr Nqaba Eugene Ngcobo, Chair of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on S&T; and Mr Ben Durham, Director of Biotechnology at the Department of Science and Technology. The addresses by the Minister and Mr Durham brought home the clear message that the South African government is firmly behind the development of the biotechnology sector in this country, as a key element in meeting national priorities.

In driving the implementation of the National Biotechnology Strategy, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) created a Biotechnology Unit. Since then, a range of instruments have been established, including three Biotechnology Research and Innovation Centres (BRICS) and the National Bio-informatics Network; interdepartmental cooperation has been promoted, and bilateral agreements have been entered into. One of the early responsibilities of NBAC will be its contribution to the review of the National Biotechnology Strategy during 2007. NBAC is expected to be a key player in reviewing and revising the Strategy and ultimately advising the Minister on strategic development of the biotechnology sector.