

GENE DRIVE FILES

DECEMBER 1, 2017 BY ADMIN

Gates Foundation paid PR firm to secretly stack UN Expert process on controversial extinction technology

Documents received under Freedom of Information requests reveal that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation ² paid a private agriculture and biotechnology PR firm \$1.6 million ¹ for activities on Gene Drives. This included running a covert ‘advocacy coalition’ ³ which appears to have intended to skew the only UN expert process addressing gene drives, a highly controversial new genetic extinction technology being developed. Further documents also show similar covert co-ordination by an established biotech lobby group co-ordinating with government representatives of Canada, UK, Brazil, USA and Netherlands in the same process.

Following global calls in December 2016 from Southern countries and over 170 organizations for a UN moratorium on gene drives ⁴, emails to gene drive advocates received under a freedom of Information request by Prickly Research reveal that a private public affairs firm ‘Emerging Ag’ received funds from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation ² to co-ordinate the “fight back against gene drive moratorium proponents.” ⁵

Under a project dubbed the “Gene Drive Research Sponsors and Supporters coalition,” ⁶ Emerging Ag covertly recruited 65-66 seemingly independent scientists and officials to stack participation in an online expert process (The UN CBD Online Forum on Synthetic Biology) ⁷, designated to discuss concerns about synthetic biology, including gene drives. The UN CBD process is the only multilateral process currently addressing the topic. ⁷ Emerging Ag briefed these “volunteers” ⁸ and issued almost daily advice on how to influence the forum.

Those who coordinated and were closely involved with the Emerging Ag influence operation included a Gates Foundation senior official ¹⁰ and at least three members of an appointed UN expert committee linked to the process ¹¹, the AHTEG (Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group) on Synthetic Biology. Two who are also AHTEG members, Dr.

Todd Kuiken of North Carolina State University and Professor Paul Freemont of Imperial College London, represent institutions that receive at least a combined \$100 million dollars in U.S. military and philanthropic funds expressly to develop and test gene drive systems.¹²

The AHTEG on Synthetic Biology will meet December 5, 2017 in Montreal and is tasked with creating advice and recommendations for governments based on the results of the online forum. Gene drives are expected to be a significant focus of the AHTEG's discussions.

Documents also reveal that Emerging Ag has also been collaborating with a biotechnology lobby group Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI), who run a similar co-ordination. PRRI's re-existing operation is detailed in emails sent to a Canadian government representative and member of the UN AHTEG. In these, PRRI boasts about a "backup operation" for "like-minded" government and industry experts who sit on the AHTEG. The emails suggest that national government representatives of Canada, U.S., UK, Brazil and the Netherlands were being remotely assisted by PRRI during closed door discussions.¹³ It appears that the 'Gene Drive Research Sponsors and Supporters coalition' offered to approach US Department of Agriculture (USDA) contacts to find additional funding for PRRI's activities.¹⁴

Footnotes:

1. Emerging Ag describes itself as "a boutique international consulting firm providing communications and public affairs services to clients in the Agriculture, Food and Health sectors." Its president and founder is Robynne Anderson, former international communications director of CropLife, the global lobby group for the biotechnology, seed and pesticide industry.

2. Email from Isabelle Cloche (VP of Strategy for Emerging Ag): "We (Emerging Ag) have been in talks with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation about securing longer term resources to enable and support advocacy and engagement activities on gene drive – in particular information sharing, collaboration and coordination on advocacy between different groups involved in this field. As I mentioned on the call of our group last Monday, the Foundation has now offered to put up some seed funding to ensure this effort continues. It is in the hope that others may join to support activities, either through funding or 'in kind' by contributing time and effort on advocacy and engagement." See file: [20170801-Re_Gene drive engagement-733.pdf](#). Additionally the grantees database for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation records Emerging Ag Inc receiving \$1,603,405 from the Foundation "to increase awareness, understanding

and acceptance of possible gene drive applications for public” –

see <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/How-We-Work/Quick-Links/Grants-Database/Grants/2017/07/OPP1174273>

3. Notes from Target Malaria Ethics Committee meeting: “Isabelle noted that the CBD meeting in December 2018, combined with growing interest in gene drive, had put the Target Malaria team on spot. It was able to reach out to a large group of like minded researchers and advocates and is now working to capitalize on this early effort by supporting efforts to build an advocacy coalition. See file: [2017 06 Notes Ethics Committee Meeting.pdf](#)

Recruitment email from Heath Packard: “We urge you to get yourself (or a colleague) nominated to the UN SBD Synthetic Biology Open-Ended Forum (July-Sept 2017). It is very important to have experts like yourselves to help balance policy discussions that might otherwise be weighted towards imposing a moratorium on gene drive research as we saw last winter at the CBD Convening of the Parties.” See file: [20170530-Action requested! CBD Syn Bio Forum-278.pdf](#)

4. For reporting on the call for a moratorium on Gene Drives at CBD COP13 in Cancun December 2016 see: [ETC Group](#) and [Scientific American](#).

Also see “[A Call for Conservation with a Conscience: No Place for Gene Drives in Conservation](#),” a letter signed by 30 environmental leaders asking that there be a “halt to all proposals for the use of gene drive technologies, but especially in conservation.”

For more background information on gene drives and the calls for a global moratorium, see: “[Reckless Driving: Gene drives and the end of nature](#)”

5. Email from Stephanie James FNIH:

“By way of this email, I would like to introduce you to Isabelle Coche. Isabelle will be working on efforts to get a broader scientific perspective represented in these discussion. She is looking for a few good scientists who have a broad perspective on the issues around gene drive and are mature enough to be able to deal with the kinds of conversations that can arise within the CBD arena. Isabelle would like the chance to explain what this all means and what activities will be needed to fight back against gene drive moratorium proponents before the next CBD meeting in 2018. Ultimately she is looking to get some volunteers to help in the cause. I hope you will all be interested enough to get back in touch with her to learn more about what this might entail. I’m sorry to say that these next few years are going to be critical and we are going to have to take the fight outside the laboratory.”

Source

6. Email from Heath Packard: “The Gene Drive Research Sponsors and Supporters coalition will be monitoring the Forum daily.” See file: 20170601-Re_CBD follow up - reminder of our call Friday 2 June-240 (N0024131xC1D49.PDF

7. The “‘volunteer’ target list” of 65 individuals that Emerging Ag recruited can be seen in the file: CBD Synbio AHTEG online forum outreach tracking sheet.xlsx

However, actual emails to this group of ‘volunteers’ went to a list of 66 individuals that appears to differ slightly from the target list. See file: 20170714-CBD Forum update-368.pdf.

In one update, notes record “On the registrations for the online forum, Isabelle noted that there are currently 19 people registered who are either directly linked to this group or considered well aligned to the position of the group. This is very positive and reflect the efforts made by everyone to reach out through their network.” See file: 2017 06 02 NOTES call

See detailed discussion on reach out to “volunteers” for the synbio on-line forum:

“Isabelle noted that the geographical diversity of participants however remains a weak point, with mostly North America and Europe represented. Greater participation from Asian, Latin American and African experts would be very useful as government representatives tend to value the opinion of experts from their region. Bob and Royden offered to help reach out through Tata, TIGs group, and GBIRD to try to get more participants from India and Oceania. Delphine is continuing outreach to Target Malaria’s partners in Africa as well. Hector offered to reach out to Douglas Miano.

Isabelle noted that in conversation with NEPAD, they had signaled their own efforts to have African experts registered but that sometimes a perceived lack of expertise was preventing them from being active in the discussions, even if they are registered. Isabelle suggested this group of experts could be made available to answer questions should NEPAD’s network want to seek opinions on some of the questions raised. The group agreed and David noted he would be available to help.

Hector and Camilla both suggested that outreach could also be done through Biotechnology Information Centers (BIC) in Asia and Jeff suggested the Asian malaria leaders group could also be a good entry point.” See file: 2017 06 02 NOTES call

8. Email from Isabelle Cloche, Emerging Ag: “I will be holding briefing calls for ‘volunteers’ this week before the online forum begins. The calls are meant to provide a very basic introduction to what the forum is and how we expect it to work, and some guidance on where and how efforts may best be spent.” See file: [20170626-Re_CBD online forum – briefing calls for _volunteers_-97.pdf](#)

9. The Gene Drive Files extensively document how Emerging Ag communicated with its volunteers. for example:

Email from Isabelle Cloche:

“The proposal is that my team (Ben Robinson and another team member tbc) will monitor the conversation and send the group regular updates and signal when it would be useful to see more engagement. This is meant to help everyone not spend hours on the sites figuring out what’s happening, but of course doesn’t preclude anyone from doing so. My team can also relay any concerns, warnings or call for engagement that you wish to share.”

See file: [20170621-CBD online forum – schedule announced – starting July 3-102.pdf](#)

Email from Ben Robinson:

“My name is Ben Robinson, I work with Isabelle Coche & Delphine Thizy, and I will be sending you regular updates on the discussions taking place in the context of the CBD’s Open-Ended Online Forum on synthetic biology. I will monitor contributions and provide you with brief summaries of the content and tenor of conversations, while highlighting topics and posts you may wish to address. Should you feel that a topic needs to be addressed but you do not have the relevant resources or expertise, I can also help identify and coordinate those best suited among the group to respond to particular issues.”

See file: [20170630-CBD Online Forum on Synthetic Biology-757.pdf](#)

Emails from Isabelle Cloche to Zach Edeleman:

“My team will be monitoring the conversation and will send regular updates and signal when it would be useful to see more engagement.”

“When relevant issues come up (it could be once a day or every few days), we will send the expert group an email. It will give you an overview of the conversations and suggest areas where contributions would be useful.”

See [file](#).

For an example of an email sent by Ben Robinson of Emerging Ag to the 65 “volunteers” during the online forum, see: example: [20170705-CBD Online Forum Update-659.pdf](#)

“The 1st two days of the CBD’s online forum on synthetic biology have not featured substantive discussion of gene drive technology. However, there have been a couple of statements which it may be useful to begin thinking about ways to respond to, as per below:

Points you may wish to address:

1. Barbara Livoreil, SBSTTA focal point for France, has raised the following points as potential new developments in synthetic biology, while asking how true they are:

“It is designed to be used “in vivo”, in field experiments, no longer in confinement only.”

“off target effects are prevalent and may prevent the prediction with a high level of certainty of the real phenotype (including behavior) of the organism and its effects on its environment”

This point in particular may be picked up by NGOs with regards to CRISPR and other gene editing techniques, so it would be good to think about arguments or publications which could be used as a response.

“It goes “faster” or “deeper” (larger modifications) than evolution (and may not consider how the natural environment may react to this).”

You can respond to Ms. Livoreil’s points here: <https://bch.cbd.int/synbio/open-ended/discussion/?threadid=8384#8392>”

10. Jeff Chertack, Senior Program Officer Global Policy and Advocacy at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is a former PR and public affairs executive from Ogilvy PR who formerly represented biotech and pharma giants in Brussels. Chertack sits on the co-ordination team meetings of Emerging Ag’s “Gene Drive Research Sponsors and Supporters coalition” and is copied on several strategy calls and co-ordination phone calls. See: [20170621-CBD online forum – schedule announced – starting July 3-102.pdf](#).

Chertack also appeared to play a key role in a recent “messaging” meeting for Gene Drive Supporters where the draft agenda includes presentation by Jeff Chertack BMGF “presentation of preliminary findings of testing gene drive concepts and terminology with stakeholders and informed publics.” See [file](#).

11. The Gene Drive Files show that the 2 following appointed members of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Synthetic Biology also took a central active role in recruitment and strategy for the “Gene Drive Research Sponsors and Supporters

coalition”: Todd Kuiken (North Carolina State University) and Bob Friedman of the J Craig Venter Institute. Additionally, Paul Freemont of Imperial College London recurs several times as an active participant in the advocacy coalition activities and is also a member of the AHTEG on Synthetic Biology. Professor Freemont’s institution (Imperial College, London) hosts both the Target Malaria coalition and provides office space for the Vice President of Strategy for Emerging Ag, Isabelle Cloche. Todd Kuiken of North Carolina State University is a key player in the GBIRd Gene Drive consortium which received \$6.4 million to develop gene drive mice for field release.

(12) Imperial College, London (at which Paul Freemont is a professor) receives at least \$92.5 million US dollars of philanthropic funds to support the Target Malaria Gene Drive project. The GBIRd (Genetic Biocontrol of Invasive Rodents) consortium of which Todd Kuiken is a key member receives \$6.4 Million U.S. for gene drive development from the US military

13. See file: PRRI back up for AHTEG.pdf – Email sent from Piet Vander Meer of PRRI (Public Research and regulation Initiative) to Jim Louter, an employee of Environment Canada. Aug 8th 2015

Extracts:

“(I) wanted to alert and invite you to an informal discussion group on CBD-SynBio which PRRI facilitates (in the same way we facilitate such groups on CPB related topics as ERA, SECs and Review). Thus far I have learned that the following people have been confirmed for the AHTEG:

PRRI

Imperial College

J Craig Venter Institute

Netherlands, GMO Office

Wilson Institute

Brazil Ministry of Agriculture

UK, HSE

US, State Department

As [redacted] said the participation of PRRI members has had quite an impact in MOPs, COPs and AHTEGs. Having said that I must correct that not all people on this email list are PRRI members. In the past tense informal groups did indeed only consist of PRRI members, but over the years these lists include other researcher, members of the other part of the regulated community (i.e. the private sector) and regulators...In addition know that we always establish a 'back up team' on the home front, who can give immediate feedback through email, or search for articles while you sleep."

14. See file: 2017 06 02 NOTES call

"In addition, Bob suggested PRRI could be a useful network to increase geographic diversity but that current lack of funding for that group was likely to impair their ability to participate. Camilla suggested reaching out to Diane Wray Cahen at USDA to see if there would be some funding opportunities for PRRI...Isabelle, Hector, Bob will see if a solution could be found to help support PRRI."

UNCATEGORIZED