

REPORT

11th Meeting of the German Nagoya Protocol HuB Network (11. GNP HuB Stammtisch)

ABS in grant applications and scientific publications

Monday January 22nd, 10:00-12:00 (CEST), ZOOM

Considerations about access and benefit sharing (ABS) get more and more relevant in scientific project planning and thus, grant applications and scientific publication. This is why our 11th Stammtisch focused on how researchers can navigate the complex landscape of ABS to ensure successful grant applications and publication.

Welcome and project update

To begin the meeting, Dr. Amber H. Scholz introduced the new 5 years phase of the German Nagoya Protocol HuB Project, the new team and the extended goals. She put a special emphasis on all the changes in focus and the team that come with the new phase of the project, which started in 2023 and is funded by the Allianz der Wissenschaftsorganisationen. Afterwards, Melania Muñoz García summarized the events that were hosted by the GNP-HuB during the last year, including the previous “Stammtisch” meetings and other workshops and conferences the project organized and participated in.

ABS before your research project starts

ABS considerations are an important part of scientific grant applications, but what information needs to be included? To answer this question, we invited Dr. Meike Teschke, the Programme Director at the “Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft” (DFG) and responsible for its ABS working group; and Andreas Holtel, Project Officer in the MICROBE project: Microbiome Biobanking (RI) Enabler, to explain the review process and the ABS information requirements in DFG and Horizon Europe grant applications.

ABS in DFG grant applications

A guide on what information on ABS needs to be included can be found in the DFG [Proposal Preparation Instructions](#) for Project Proposals (DFG form 54.01) under point 4.1.4. It is important to show in your grant application that you are aware of and understand the ABS obligations that apply to your project and indicate any steps you have taken or plan to take to fulfil these requirements. Also, you have to include if you have project partners in provider countries and its role in the ABS processes. Mention what genetic resources may be transported to Germany and note that in addition to ABS permits from the provider country, a declaration of due diligence may also be required in line with the German law and the EU ABS Regulation. However, it is neither expected to contact or negotiate with national focal points nor to have a permit before a funding decision has been finalized.

As obtaining ABS permits can take a long time, the project and funding start can be delayed for up to one year after the funding decision. Even though it is not an obligation to start the ABS processes in

advance of the grant approval, it may be a good idea to inform yourself and contact the national focal points in advance, and ask about waiting times, to avoid unwanted delays.

ABS in Horizon Europe grant applications

Next, Andreas Holtel gave some insight into Horizon Europe grant applications. He highlighted the parts of the self-assessment documents that are relevant to ABS. Applicants have to fulfill *the Ethics issues table* composed of yes/no questions related to ethical concerns about research with humans, data protection, animal care, among others. The ABS-related questions are in the section on *non-EU countries*. The table includes questions about using resources from those countries, including genetic material, and importing material to the EU. If you answer yes to any of the questions in the table, you must perform an ethics self-assessment. Once again it was emphasized that it is important to show awareness of your ABS obligation. You have to include the objectives and methods related to the Nagoya Protocol, and describe the actions to be taken to ensure all the project activities with the National and EU Regulations.

Mr. Holtel then elaborated on how the review process is conducted for these ethics self-assessments. For Horizon Europe grant applications, there is an ethics screening conducted, evaluating many different ethical aspects, including ABS, as mentioned before. This screening produces a report, which is then automatically transformed into ethical requirements.

Another point to keep in mind is that in the ethics self-assessment, ABS matters are categorized under concerns related to work in non-EU countries. There are, however, also EU countries that regulate access to their genetic resources, e.g. France and Spain. ABS matters should be included under "other issues" in the *Ethics issues table*.

ABS when your research project is done: benefit-sharing information in scientific publications

In the next part of the Stammtisch Genuar Núñez, who is working with the *Examining trends on non-monetary benefit-sharing* project (ET-NMBS) at the DSMZ, gave a presentation about his research concerning ABS permits in scientific publications. He noted that there aren't any standards established on how to include ABS permits in scientific papers.

One of the main takeaways for researchers is that some scientific journals have implemented different policies on ABS permit disclosure. *PloS one* is implementing best practices in research reporting, including the mention of ABS agreements obtained, while *Plants* is requesting ethical statements related to ABS. On the other hand, *Nature Portfolio* journals include guidelines to encourage collaboration with local researchers and their inclusion as co-authors. Moreover, *Molecular Ecology* and *Molecular Ecology Resources* now require, as a condition for publication, that the research described in the publication complies with relevant national laws implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity and Nagoya Protocol agreements.

Something that came up in the following discussion is that some countries stipulate how the permits should be cited. Moreover, it is important to cite ABS compliance, even if it is not mandatory, to



increase the visibility of non-monetary benefit-sharing from non-commercial research. Using model statements and seeing other writers' reporting styles helps make this process simpler.

Reflection and wrap up

In wrapping up our 11. GNP HuB Stammtisch, we've gained valuable insights into ABS in grant applications and scientific publications. Let's take these lessons forward, striving for responsible research practices that promote transparency. Thanks to all the contributors, and let's keep this important conversation going.