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Inter-agency workshop on synthetic biology and national security

Meeting Date:	03 April 2025	Meeting Time:	09.30hr AEDT – 11.45hr AEDT
Venue:	In person – s. 33(a)(i) Virtual – Microsoft Teams link provided in the invite.		
Co-chairs:	Department of Home Affairs Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)		
Attendees	EL2/SESBI preferred. Minimum baseline clearance required.		

Objectives

The workshop seeks to bring together policy, regulatory and technical specialists from across the Commonwealth to:

- A. develop a shared understanding of the national security risks presented by developments in synthetic biology and biotechnology,
- B. assess whether Australia's current policy and regulatory framework is adequate for managing these risks (in the short, medium and long terms), and
- C. determine if more concentrated, coordination actions are required (including escalation).

Context

In 2017, Australia's regulation of synthetic biology (such as synthetic DNA) was highlighted as an emerging issue in the *Third Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme*. The report emphasised the need for ongoing monitoring to ensure that the regulatory framework remained effective and adaptable to the rapid advancements in technology.¹ The report further recognised that, while current applications of synthetic DNA were covered under existing regulations, the fast-paced development of this technology required ongoing monitoring to address any potential risks.

Recent and pending advancements in biotechnology (such as benchtop DNA synthesisers), artificial intelligence (AI), and robotics and automation have significantly lowered the barriers to entry for designing and engineering biological material. While these technologies offer numerous benefits, they may also pose potential risks. s. 33(a)(i)

s. 33(a)(i)

¹ Commonwealth Department of Health, *The Third Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), page 27, <https://www.genetechnology.gov.au/resources/publications/2017-review-final-report>

² For example see, O'Brien JT, Nelson C, *Assessing the Risks Posed by the Convergence of Artificial Intelligence and Biotechnology* (Health Security, 2020) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32559154/>, Crawford F, Webster K, Epstein G et al., *Securing Commercial Nucleic Acid Synthesis* (RAND, 2024) https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA3329-1.html, Garfinkel MS, Endy D, Epstein GL, Friedman RM, *Synthetic genomics | options for governance* (J Craig Venter Institute, 2007) <https://www.icvi.org/sites/default/files/assets/projects/synthetic-genomics-options-for-governance/synthetic-genomics-report.pdf>

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Agenda

Agenda Item	Lead	Duration
1. Welcome and introductions	Co-Chairs	15 minutes
2. Setting the scene – how are technologies and markets evolving?		35 minutes
• Discussion: What are the current trends in synthetic biology and biotechnology developments and commercialisation? What are the trends in convergence? – Import applications – Threat environment – Horizon scanning technology development	DAFF DAFF, Health All	
s. 33(a)(i)		
3. Policy review – existing risk mitigation	DAFF	30 minutes
• Overview of current regulatory environment – What are current agency responsibilities? – How do agencies currently balance regulation with scientific progress? • Discussion: What gaps do you see in our current regulatory framework that need to be addressed to effectively manage emerging risks?	Health	
Break		10 minutes
4. Discussion – is additional action required?	Co-Chairs	30 minutes
• If not: – How should we formalise this conclusion? – How can we stay informed about future developments? • If so: – What specific mitigation strategies would be most effective in the short term? What about in the long term? Are there upcoming opportunities that could be leveraged? – What are the immediate next steps we need to take to move forward with the recommendations and strategies discussed today? – How could we assess or measure effectiveness?		
5. Close and next steps	Co-Chairs	15 minutes

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Attendees

Agency	Equity
1. Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority	Direct regulatory role of animal pathogens/zoonoses
2. Australian Research Council	Public funder of research and provide guidelines on research ethics and integrity
3. s. 7(2A)	
4. Australian Federal Police	Enforces Commonwealth criminal law.
5. Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	Conducts scientific research to support Australia's economic, social, and environmental goals
6. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Administration of import controls on agricultural, fisheries and forestry industries products, animal and plant biosecurity Joint administration of the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i>
7. Department of Defence	Leads defence against chemical and biological threats (including through Defence Science and Technology Group) Administers the <i>Defence Export Controls Act 2012</i>
8. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	International policy and trade relations, including arms control
9. Department of Health and Aged Care	Public health policy and regulation Joint administration of the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> Administration of the <i>National Health Security Act 2007</i>
10. Department of Home Affairs	National security policy coordination (including national security risk from AI, counter-terrorism and emergency management)
11. Department of Industry, Science and Resources	Science and technology policy, including biotechnology, AI and robotics
12. Interim Australian Centre for Disease Control	Disease prevention and control, including emergency health management and Communicable diseases and surveillance
13. National Health and Medical Research Council	Responsible for funding and overseeing health and medical research, including providing guidelines and advice on research ethics and integrity
14. s. 7(2A)	
15. Office of the Gene Technology Regulator	Regulation of gene technology and synthetic DNA Administration of the <i>Gene Technology Act 2000</i>

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Document details

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Date: 13 March 2025 TRIM (HA): ADD2024/5418522

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Inter-agency Workshop on Synthetic Biology and National Security: Outcomes

Date: 03 April 2025

Time: 09:30hr – 11:30hr AEDT

Attachment A: Workshop attendees

Summary

The synthetic biology and national security workshop ('the workshop') brought together experts from policy, intelligence, regulatory and technical fields to explore emerging challenges and opportunities. Key themes included increasing accessibility of biological tools post-COVID, the risks posed by convergence of biotechnologies with artificial intelligence (AI), and the challenges of regulating synthetically engineered materials with existing regulatory frameworks and legislation. There was a strong emphasis on finding a balance between supporting innovation and industry, alongside managing security risks.

Trends and horizon scanning

1.

s. 33(a)(i)

2. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) provides permits for importing biological technologies and materials specified in the *Biosecurity Act 2015*. s. 33(a)(i)

s. 33(a)(i)

s. 33(a)(i)

DAFF also consider the demand for desktop/benchtop synthesisers will increase in the near future, most likely within the university sector.

3. The Interim Centre for Disease Control (CDC – within the Department of Health and Aged Care) advised the increase in on-selling and desktop synthesisers will lead to a range of benefits, but also risks. Benefits include an improved ability to fight disease, including the use of AI for solving or expanding research into gene formulation and technology. s. 33(a)(i)

s. 33(a)(i)

The decreasing cost of materials provides opportunities for people to get access to this equipment, s. 33(a)(i)

4.

s. 7(2A)

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s. 7(2A)

5. Attendees recognised the 'Protect and Promote' approach for regulatory and policy efforts relating to synthetic biotechnology. This will ensure appropriate regulation that addresses risk without over regulating, and supports industry and scientific discovery. This is particularly important as the biotechnology industry generates important revenue for Australia. Attendees recognised that a pragmatic and proportionate approach is important.

Existing mitigations

6. The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) provided an overview of [proposed legislative amendments to the Gene Technology Act 2000](#) – federal legislation that works in concert with state legislation and alongside product regulators such as the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA). The *Gene Technology Act 2000* focuses on regulating defined activities with genetically modified organisms, accreditation of organisations and certification measures of containment facilities (it does not include regulating specific materials, actors or laboratories). The legislative changes most relevant to this workshop are amendments to the definitions of 'gene technology' and 'genetically modified organism', to include organisms that are produced by gene technology (i.e. synthetic biology).
7. While attendees noted industry compliance with regulations is good, s. 33(a)(i) [REDACTED] s. 33(a)(i) [REDACTED]. Extra support may be required for industry and academia to raise awareness of their obligations to appropriately manage biotechnologies already within Australia. This may be of particular benefit to new start-up companies who may also be new to the regulatory domain. The Department of Industry Science and Resources (DISR) suggested a 'single source of truth' document may be of benefit to start-ups.
8. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) noted the importance of international engagements and collaboration. Controls in Australia often work with likeminded partners, but there will likely be a gap between international and domestic standards and efforts to protect against key threats. There is a strong appetite for international partnerships to assist in mitigating risks and enhancing safeguards.
 - s. 33(a)(i) [REDACTED] s. 33(a)(i) [REDACTED] They also drive international harmonised export controls through the Australia Group, and s. 33(a)(i), s. 33(a)(iii) [REDACTED] s. 33(a)(i), s. 33(a)(iii) [REDACTED] DFAT requested attendees contact them if there are particular effects to be achieved in the international domain.
9. s. 33(a)(i) [REDACTED]
10. s. 33(a)(i) [REDACTED]
11. Attendees advised that current regulations offer a certain level of protection for now, but may need fine tuning in the future. All agencies will actively monitor and watch the landscape, focusing on capability and risk, for developments that may require additional interventions.

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Outcomes

Outcome	Lead
1 Home Affairs to contact Defence Export Controls to back brief on the workshop. This is to support collaboration, and ensure there is no duplication of effort.	Home Affairs
2 Home Affairs to consider a concept for an education and engagement strategy with industry and academia on regulatory responsibilities. This is with the intent to address regulatory knowledge gaps within the sector, and improve visibility of on-selling technology and material within the sector.	Home Affairs
3 s. 7(2A)	s. 7(2A) Home Affairs
4 s. 33(a)(i)	Home Affairs
5 Agencies will highlight relevant linkages to the proposed <i>Gene Technology Act 2000</i> reforms, where the opportunity allows in Incoming Government Briefs and other relevant briefs. This is to bring existing work to the attention of an incoming Government, and highlight its industry and security impacts.	All agencies
6 Agencies will engage with DFAT if there are matters, or effects, they wish to achieve within the international domain.	All agencies
7 Home Affairs to facilitate another meeting in the next quarter to discuss key developments and progress of the workshop outcomes.	Home Affairs

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Date: 14 April 2025

TRIM: ADD2025/2514135

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Attachment A - workshop attendees

Organisation	Attendees	Role
Department of Home Affairs	Britt Ryan – Assistant Secretary, Technology Security Policy Branch s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Senior Policy Officer, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Policy Officer, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Policy Officer, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Data Security and Strategy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Senior Policy Officer, Data Security and Strategy	National security policy coordination (including national security risk from AI, counter-terrorism and emergency management).
Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Executive Director Registration Management	Direct regulatory role of animal pathogens / zoonoses

s. 7(2A)

Australian Federal Police	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – s. 33(a)(i)	Enforces Commonwealth criminal law.
Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Research Director s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Advanced Engineering Biology Future Science Platform s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Advanced Engineering Biology Future Science Platform	Conducts scientific research to support Australia's economic, social, and environmental goals.
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – A/g Principal Regulatory Scientist, Animal Biosecurity Branch s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director Senior Scientist, Animal Biosecurity Branch s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director of Laboratory and Human Tissues team, Animal and Biological Imports Branch from Animal Division s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director Laboratory and Human tissues	Administration of import controls on agricultural, fisheries and forestry industries products, animal and plant biosecurity Joint administration of the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i>.

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Organisation	Attendees	Role
Department of Defence	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director DSTG SABRE Alliance s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – DSTG	Leads defence against chemical and biological threats (including through Defence Science and Technology Group). Administers the <i>Defence Export Controls Act 2012</i> .
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Counter Proliferation section in the Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation Branch. s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director of Counter Proliferation section in the Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation Branch.	International policy and trade relations, including arms control.
Department of Health and Aged Care	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Nominated proxy for Director of CDC Data Strategy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Medical Scientific Advisory Unit	Public health policy and regulation. Joint administration of the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> . Administration of the <i>National Health Security Act 2007</i> .
Department of Industry, Science and Resources	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – A/g Manager Industrial biotech and circular economy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – A/g General Manager, Building and Biotechnologies s. 22(1)(a)(ii) s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Manager, Critical Technologies Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director Critical Technologies Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) s. 22(1)(a)(ii)	Science and technology policy, including biotechnology, AI and robotics.

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Organisation	Attendees	Role
Interim Australian Centre for Disease Control (within the Department of Health and Aged Care).	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director Health Security Unit s. 22(1)(a)(ii) Assistant Director Health Security Unit s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director Health Security Unit s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director Health lab security s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director Laboratories and Pathogen Security Section s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director Laboratories and Pathogen Security Section	Disease prevention and control, including emergency health management and Communicable diseases and surveillance
National Health and Medical Research Council	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director Research Strategy and Engagement	Responsible for funding and overseeing health and medical research, including providing guidelines and advice on research ethics and integrity.
Office of the Gene Technology Regulator	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director of Regulatory Practice Section	Regulation of dealings with genetically modified organisms. Administration of the <i>Gene Technology Act 2000</i> .
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Critical Infrastructure Counter Foreign Interference Section s. 22(1)(a)(ii) - Critical Infrastructure Counter Foreign Interference Section	Intergovernmental and whole of government policy coordination and assisting the Prime Minister.
Attorney-General's Department	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director, Counter-Terrorism Legislation s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Artificial Intelligence Unit	Maintain and improve Australia's law and justice framework.
Other	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) s. 22(1)(a)(ii)	

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SYNAPSE: Inter-agency workshop on synthetic biology and national security

Meeting Date:	26 November 2025	Meeting Time:	1000-1130 AEST
Venue:	In person – s. 33(a)(i) Virtual – Microsoft Teams link provided in the invite.		
Co-chairs:	Department of Home Affairs Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)		
Attendees	EL2/SESB1 preferred. Minimum baseline clearance required.		

Objectives

The workshop seeks to bring together policy, regulatory and technical specialists from across the Commonwealth to build upon work commenced in the April 2025 workshop and:

- A. develop a shared understanding of the national security risks presented by developments in synthetic biology and biotechnology,
- B. assess whether Australia's current policy and regulatory framework is adequate for managing these risks (in the short, medium and long terms), and
- C. determine if more concentrated, coordination actions are required (including escalation).

Context

The *Synthetic Biology and AI Protection and Security Effort* (SYNAPSE), co-chaired by Home Affairs and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, is working group which includes a range of policy, operational and regulatory agencies. The intent of this group is to propose proportionate, future-focussed, and actionable mitigations to risks identified that protect human health and national security while appropriately supporting innovation, scientific progress, industry, and public trust.

SYNAPSE held its first workshop in April 2025. Key themes included s. 33(a)(i)

There was a strong emphasis on finding a balance between supporting innovation and industry alongside managing security risks. More information on the discussion and outcomes from this earlier workshop can be found in the meeting summary document that was distributed to members, and can be provided upon request.

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Agenda

Agenda Item	Lead	Duration
1. Welcome	Co-Chairs	15 minutes
2. Update on outcomes from the last workshop (attachment A)		15 minutes
• s. 7(2A) • Education – update from TechFIT. • Risk overview and equities (to be discussed in the next section)	Home Affairs Home Affairs	
3. Gaps and opportunities	All	50 minutes
<i>Discussion: Given the common risks, and stakeholder equities, what are the perceived gaps and opportunities in the current landscape?</i> s. 33(a)(i) s. 33(a)(i)		
Break		15 minutes
4. Spotlight: Artificial Intelligence	Home Affairs DISR	30 minutes
• Update on Home Affairs work to date. • Update on DISR work to date.		
5. Close and next steps	Co-Chairs	10 minutes

Attendees

Agency	Equity
1. Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority	Direct regulatory role of animal pathogens/zoonoses
2. s. 7(2A)	
3. Australian Federal Police	Enforces Commonwealth criminal law.
4. Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	Conducts scientific research to support Australia's economic, social, and environmental goals
5. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Administration of import controls on agricultural, fisheries and forestry industries products, animal and plant biosecurity Joint administration of the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i>

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Agency	Equity
6. Department of Defence	Leads defence against chemical and biological threats (including through Defence Science and Technology Group) Administers the <i>Defence Export Controls Act 2012</i>
7. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	International policy and trade relations, including arms control
8. Department of Health and Aged Care	Public health policy and regulation Joint administration of the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> Administration of the <i>National Health Security Act 2007</i>
9. Department of Home Affairs	National security policy coordination (including national security risk from AI, counter-terrorism and emergency management)
10. Department of Industry, Science and Resources	Science and technology policy, including biotechnology, AI and robotics
11. Interim Australian Centre for Disease Control	Disease prevention and control, including emergency health management and Communicable diseases and surveillance
12. National Health and Medical Research Council	Responsible for funding and overseeing health and medical research, including providing guidelines and advice on research ethics and integrity
13. s. 7(2A)	
14. Office of the Gene Technology Regulator	Regulation of gene technology and synthetic DNA Administration of the <i>Gene Technology Act 2000</i>
15. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet	Intergovernmental and whole of government policy coordination and assisting the Prime Minister.
16. Attorney-General's Department	Maintain and improve Australia's law and justice framework.

Document details

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Date: 14 October 2025

TRIM (HA): ADD2024/5280710

Attachment A: Outcomes from the April 2025 workshop:

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Outcome	Lead	Status
Home Affairs to contact Defence Export Controls to back brief on the workshop. This is to support collaboration, and ensure there is no duplication of effort.	Home Affairs	Completed.
Home Affairs to consider a concept for an education and engagement strategy with industry and academia on regulatory responsibilities. This is with the intent to address regulatory knowledge gaps within the sector, and improve visibility of on-selling technology and material within the sector.	Home Affairs	Update by TechFIT at the September 2025 workshop.
s. 7(2A)	s. 7(2A) Home Affairs	Completed.
s. 33(a)(i)	Home Affairs	Update by Critical and Emerging Technology at the September 2025 workshop.
Agencies will highlight relevant linkages to the proposed <u>Gene Technology Act 2000</u> reforms, where the opportunity allows in Incoming Government Briefs and other relevant briefs. This is to bring existing work to the attention of an incoming Government, and highlight its industry and security impacts.	All agencies	Completed.
Agencies will engage with DFAT if there are matters, or effects, they wish to achieve within the international domain.	All agencies	Completed.



SYNAPSE Workshop: Summary and Outcomes

Date: 26 November 2025

Time: 10:00hr – 12:00hr AEDT

Attachment A: workshop attendees

Summary

The Synthetic Biology and AI Protection and Security Effort (SYNAPSE) workshops bring together experts from policy, regulatory and technical fields to explore emerging challenges and opportunities. This November 2025 workshop (the workshop) built on key themes from the inaugural April 2025 workshop, such as increasing accessibility of biological tools, onshore onselling and oversight, and regulating infectious materials for commercial purposes.

Specifically, the workshop discussed industry engagement and risk education efforts, Know Your Customer requirements and sequence screening, proposed changes to the *Gene Technology Act*, and the establishment of Australia's new Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute (AISi). Both workshops have acknowledged the importance of finding a balance between enabling innovation across these areas and managing biotechnology-related risks.

Current action items from the workshop include continuing to support proposed changes to the *Gene Technology Act*, investigating further options for industry engagement and education on risk, briefing on the new AISi and Australian Centre for Disease Control, providing whole of Australian Government talking points on the National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Plan, and providing oversight of a number of international developments as they arise.

As we move towards the next SYNAPSE workshop tentatively planned for Q2, 2026, a unified, whole of Australian Government approach to risk communication has also been highlighted as a priority to avoid conflicting public messages.

Outcomes from the last workshop

1. Previous workshop outcomes were **reviewed and closed** at the November 2025 meeting. A summary:

Outcome	Status
Home Affairs to back brief Defence Export Controls (DEC) on the April 2025 workshop.	Completed.
Home Affairs to consider an education and engagement strategy with industry and academia on regulatory responsibilities.	Completed – see point 2, below.

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Outcome	Status
s. 7(2A)	Completed.
s. 33(a)(i)	s. 33(a)(i)
Agencies will highlight relevant linkages to the proposed <i>Gene Technology Act 2000</i> reforms, where the opportunity allows in Incoming Government Briefs and other relevant briefs.	Completed.
Agencies will engage with Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) if there are matters, or effects, they wish to achieve within the international domain.	Completed.

- The Home Affairs Technology Foreign Interference Taskforce (TechFIT) provided a presentation on its work. TechFIT was established in October 2024 to raise awareness and build resilience in the Australian technology industry against foreign interference and espionage threats. TechFIT shared key insights learned through its engagements with the biotechnology industry:

s. 33(a)(i)

- Both Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) (regarding industry engagement) and DFAT s. 33(a)(i) will reach out to TechFIT to discuss collaboration. All members are encouraged to contact TechFIT if they wish for further information or future collaboration at s. 22(1)(a)(iii)@homeaffairs.gov.au.

Gaps and Opportunities

- s. 33(a)(i)
- Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) provided an overview of proposed changes to the *Gene Technology Act*. New definitions have been proposed to ensure that extensions/advancements in modern technologies (including synthetic biology) continue to be captured. OGTR will come to SYNAPSE members for consultation when the process commences, tentatively August 2026. Home Affairs suggested linking this work to SYNAPSE to elevate the priority, if required, and can provide national security input on request.

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6. Members noted recent international trends. DAFF raised the US and EU's approach to prioritising education as an alternative to more burdensome regulatory levers. Home Affairs noted the current US administration has been encouraging like-minded countries to consider screening frameworks of different levels of compulsion. All members reiterated the importance of balancing regulation with innovation and industry.

7. **s. 7(2A)**

8. Members advised industry may be reluctant to engage with government where they believe engagement will lead to regulation/further regulation; however, there is appetite from industry to get high level information from government regarding risk. s. 7(2A)

s. 7(2A)

s. 7(2A) DAFF noted most "traditional" DNA synthesis companies are historically highly compliant in self-regulation/screening orders of sensitive sequences, however, decreasing costs have led to new entrants into this industry s. 33(a)(iii)

s. 37(2)(b)

9. **s. 33(a)(i)**

10. **s. 37(2)(b)**

11. Members queried if an onshore repository of the s. 33(a)(i) gene catalogue could mitigate risk from the increase in importation of genetic materials. s. 33(a)(i)

s. 33(a)(i)

Spotlight: Artificial Intelligence

12. DISR advised the recently released National AI Plan has s. 33(a)(i) capturing the opportunities of AI through supporting investment, growth and adoption; spreading the benefits; and keeping Australians Safe. A key element of the keeping Australian's safe pillar is establishing an AI Safety Institute (AISi).
13. The AISi, which will be operational in early 2026, will monitor, test, and share information on emerging AI capabilities and risks. It will provide a source of evidence to support decision makers to keep Australian's safe by sharing information across government, s. 33(a)(i) and supporting established functions. AISi will also be a member of the International Network of AI Safety Institutes which also includes US, UK, and Canada. They will look at best-practice approaches to progressing the science behind keeping people safe from AI, which currently lags behind the advances in AI capabilities. The International Network of AI Safety Institutes conducts tests on frontier open-source models, and this will be factored into the AISi's work program. AISi will establish a research agenda in early 2026, which will include a coordination and collaboration piece of work across government, and will increase its in-house technical capabilities with the hiring of technical experts.

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14. DISR will also look to continue to contribute to the International AI Safety Report, noting the recently released International AI Safety Report's Second Key Update showed that sophisticated attackers can still bypass current large language models' safeguards s. 33(a)(i)
15. Home Affairs advised its role is to provide national security policy advice on AI. Home Affairs noted its recent work on banning of DeepSeek through the Department's Protective Security Policy Framework, and work on providing advice on AI risk to critical infrastructure owners and operators and through the Trusted Information Sharing Network. s. 7(2A)

Other business

16. DFAT expressed its appreciation to DAFF for their work at the World Organisation for Animal Health Global Conference on Biological Threats, s. 33(a)(i)
17. s. 33(a)(i), s. 33(a)(iii)
18. DFAT noted the next Biological Weapons Convention coming up in December 2025 and will pass on any information regarding synthetic biology which may be raised. DFAT could assist SYNAPSE engagement with the Australia Group and DEC, should any proposed inclusions be sought.
19. Home Affairs is tentatively planning the next SYNAPSE workshop for early Q2, 2026.

Action Items

Action	Lead	
1	OGTR to seek SYNAPSE assistance as needed, including national security input, on the proposed changes to the <i>Gene Technology Act</i> .	OGTR
2	s. 33(a)(i)	Home Affairs
3	AISI and the Australian Centre for Disease Control (ACDC) to provide a brief at the next SYNAPSE meeting on its new organisational structures. This will assist stakeholders in understanding the distinction between AISI and DISR, and between ACDC and Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.	AISI and Australian Centre for Disease Control
4	DISR to provide the Whole of Australian Government Talking Points on the National AI Plan, once developed.	DISR
5	DFAT to provide an update to SYNAPSE members on relevant upcoming bodies of work to which SYNAPSE can support or provide information, such as the Biological Weapons Convention in December 2025.	DFAT
6	s. 33(a)(iii)	DFAT

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Contact s. 22(1)(a)(ii) Policy Officer Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy,
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Attachment A

Attendees

Organisation	Attendees
Department of Home Affairs	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – a/g Assistant Secretary, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – a/g Director, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Senior Policy Officer, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Senior Policy Officer, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – a/g Senior Policy Officer, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – a/g Senior Policy Officer, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Graduate, Critical and Emerging Technology Security Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Policy Officer, Countering Unwanted Technology Transfer
Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Head of Operational Policy s. 22(1)(a)(ii) –

s. 7(2A)

Australian Federal Police	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – s. 33(a)(i) s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – s. 33(a)(i)
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Principal Regulatory Scientist, Animal Biosecurity Branch s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director, Laboratory and Human Tissues Team, Animal and Biological Imports Branch s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Biologicals and Dairy Team, Animal Biosecurity Branch s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Senior Veterinary Officer, Biologicals and Dairy Team, Animal Biosecurity Branch s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Laboratory and Human Tissues Team, Animal and Biological Imports Branch
Department of Defence	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director, DSTG SABRE Alliance

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Organisation	Attendees
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director, Counter Proliferation Section in the Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation Branch.
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) Director, Health Security Unit
Department of Industry, Science and Resources	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director, Critical Technologies Policy and Security Section s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Manager, Critical Technologies Policy and Security Section s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – a/g Assistant Director, AI Governance Branch
Interim Australian Centre for Disease Control	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director, Laboratories and Pathogen Security Section s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Laboratories and Pathogen Security Section s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Laboratories and Pathogen Security Section
National Health and Medical Research Council	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director, Research Strategy and Engagement s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Research Strategy and Engagement
Office of the Gene Technology Regulator	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – a/g Executive Director, Evaluation Branch s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – a/g Director, Monitoring and Compliance s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Assistant Director, Monitoring and Compliance

Apologies

Organisation	Attendees
Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Research Director
Interim Australian Centre for Disease Control	s. 22(1)(a)(ii) – Director, One Health Unit

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