

Communicating with journalists seeking comment about wrongful claims that Australian DIYBio community labs have violated gene technology regulations – Scenario D

Case Study to Guidance for Communicating on Gene Technology 2025¹

Journalists contact members of community lab spaces in the Australian DIYBio² community. The journalists are seeking comments on claims made by people overseas that they have conducted genetic self-modification experiments. The Australian community labs operate PC-1 certified facilities, adhere to strict regulatory guidelines, and foster collaborative relationships with the OGTR. Their work focuses on legitimate projects such as biodiversity monitoring and public science education. Most members of the volunteer-led Australian DIYBio community are not used to dealing with journalists. Complicating matters, a member of parliament has publicly called for "greater scrutiny of unregulated genetic experimentation," mistakenly believing that the Australian DIYBio labs are unregulated. How should the Australian DIYBio community respond to media enquiries? How can they protect their reputation for responsible practice, and their continuing contributions to society and science, and preserve their relationships with regulatory authorities?

Hypothetical Responses to the Guiding Questions

1. What is your purpose or goal (i.e., why do they want to communicate) and on what time scale do they hope to achieve that goal?

The objectives of different individuals and labs may differ slightly. However, the DIYBio community has previously identified common communication goals that include:

- Reassuring regulators, the public, and community lab partners that their activities are safely conducted and legally compliant.
- Countering misinformation about DIYBio activities before it undermines public trust, and
- Reframing negative publicity about DIYbio to increase support for DIYBio.

The DIYBio community believes they need to respond promptly — within hours or days — to correct the misinformation... *(the reader, on further reflection, may have additional responses)*

2. With whom do you wish to engage—that is, who is your audience or target?

There are differences between members of the DIYBio community but overall their intended audience is:

- Mainstream and specialist science journalists seeking comment.

¹ Gene Technology Ethics & Community Consultative Committee [Guidance for Communicating on Gene Technology 2025](#)

² Do-it-yourself biology

- The member of parliament who is calling for “greater scrutiny”.
- Existing supporters and newly curious members of the public who engage with DIYBio on social media.
- OGTR officers and state health departments who are monitoring regulatory compliance...

3. How can you ensure that your communication is transparent and that you are open about assumptions and uncertainties, benefits and risks?

DIYBio organisations can:

- Publish safety protocols, and review activities on their website.
- Share examples of real projects that are in progress in their own lab or group.
- Acknowledge that ‘rogue’ (or unregulated) experimentation can’t be ruled out globally while clarifying how the Australian regulatory setting, and their own community lab or group, reduces that risk in Australia.
- Encourage more members of the public to come to open days or workshops to see for themselves...

4. Are you communicating based on your specific expertise, and what evidence will you use to ensure that your claims are accurate and can be externally fact checked?

DIYBio organisations and individuals may consider:

- Nominating as media spokespeople BioLab representatives who are expert in current gene technology (and can explain it to a lay audience), PC-1 regulatory requirements, and aspects of biosafety and biosecurity relevant to community groups or labs in Australia.
- Redirecting journalists to the OGTR, for specific questions about regulations.
- Including in communications references and links to authoritative sources that can be shared and verified such as the OGTR guidelines, relevant sections of the Gene Technology Act, and recent formal inspection reports...

5. How can you move away from simply giving people information — which assumes that the problem is their lack of knowledge and has been shown to rarely work — and instead, have two-way conversations and shared reflection between you and the target audience?

Two-way conversations and shared reflections can be encouraged in the DIYBio community by:

- Hosting community-wide online Q&A session (e.g. Facebook Live or Zoom webinar) where journalists and the public can pose questions to community members.
- Inviting members of parliament and the local community to tour DIYBio labs, to ask questions and to observe safety practices.
- Developing FAQs based on recurring questions and publishing them on websites...

6. What forms of media and forums are the best for communicating your message and why?

The DIYBio community consider:

- Using a written statement or fact sheet emailed to media outlets and posted on lab websites as a first response.
- Visual aids such as infographics of the PC-1 laboratory layout to explain the containment practices and protocols for best practice biosafety.
- Social media channels that are used by journalists, parliamentarians and people interested in DIYBio.
- Stakeholder or press briefings...

7. What values, meanings, attitudes, beliefs, or other underlying considerations should be articulated when crafting your communication plan and the language used within it?

DIYBio communicators may

- Emphasise that while community labs value transparency and open science, they also value scientific merit, integrity and safety.
- Avoid hyperbole or superlatives such as “revolutionary” or “miracle cure” and can encourage all communicators about DIYBio to do the same.
- Recognise that not all members of the local or global biology community may share the same views about novel gene technologies.
- Articulate that they are representing only the values and work of their group, and be mindful that their own work, and how they communicate it will impact other community labs across Australia...

8. Given the rapid pace of developments in gene technology research, how can your communication strategy be designed to remain relevant and valid for as long as possible?

The DIYBio community and/or individual community labs can assign a DIYBio member to:

- Monitor media coverage about self-modification experiments, set up an RSS feed or other automatic notifications, and update public-facing resources such as websites and social media.
- Review fact sheets and FAQs developed in response to the self-modification incident regularly.
- Seek advice and the support of the broader Australian scientific community and maintain a collegial rapport.
- Develop mechanisms to keep the DIYBio community up to date with changes in gene technology and external commentary...

9. What are likely to be the most effective and ethical strategies for communicating about gene technology in the face of mis/disinformation and fake news?

To prepare for future wrongful allegations, members of the DIYBio community consider:

- Codifying an agreed policy for each group or community lab about who will speak publicly on behalf of the group or organization, and when it is helpful to respond to media requests.
- Preparing sample responses for challenging questions.
- Sharing resources and toolkits, and establishing peer-to-peer mentoring frameworks, to help members take part in the discourse.
- Encourage the posting of a FAQ section on each Australian community lab or group's public website or pinned to the top of any social media account including, for example, how regulations differ in Australia from overseas.
- Discouraging DIYBio community members from 're-posting' or repeating mis/disinformation and helping them to identify potential mis/disinformation.
- Nurturing allies in the Australian scientific community who can offer an outside perspective to help counter mis/disinformation.
- Telling more stories about Australia's community-science sector that are accurate to dilute out mis/disinformation...

Version Control Table:

Version	Author	Date	Changes
1.0	GTECCC	15/12/2025	Version 1.0 Final