

## Editorial

# E-BioSci

E-BioSci is a new initiative launched by EMBO and supported by many learned societies. It will encompass a range of activities that will exploit the potential of the world-wide web to publish, interconnect and retrieve biological information in many different forms when it becomes fully operational. Although E-BioSci is often described as an initiative in electronic publishing, this does not really convey the dramatic impact of the revolution that is now taking place both in biology and in the world of publishing. The rapid growth in the field of genomics is having far-reaching effects on all aspects of research in the life sciences, including the way in which hypotheses are formulated, experiments designed and interpreted and, ultimately, findings are published. Paper is turning out to be an inadequate medium for data that are either too demanding of page space (sequences, sequence-related information), or are impossible to represent adequately within the two dimensions of the printed page (multi-dimensional images, video's). Additionally and increasingly frequently, readers of the published literature are demanding data that can be computer manipulated to allow further analysis and new forms of representation as an aid to interpretation.

It is against this background that originally EMBO initiated discussions with a number of interested parties, that included research funding organizations, publishers, libraries and research scientists, in order to sound out the feasibility of establishing a European platform capable of offering high quality services related to information searching, linkage and retrieval. The outcome of these discussions has been overwhelmingly positive and set the scene for the first concrete steps in the realization of the platform that will hopefully play a global role in the dissemination of digital information in the life sciences. In the course of 2000, funds were put forward to seed activities and the European Molecular Biology Conference (the treaty organization that supports EMBO) took the historic step of incorporating E-BioSci into its programme. More recently, the European Commission has lent tangible support to the concept of a European information platform by promising financial support from within the Research Infrastructures section of the 5th Framework Quality of Life Programme.

This promise of funding has been instrumental in driving

the formation of a core network of institutions that will provide prototype E-BioSci services. There are now good expectations that a platform demonstrating proof of principle can be launched later this year. Ultimately, E-BioSci will allow users to navigate seamlessly between bibliographic, sequence or image databases and the relevant full text published literature. However, unlike the PubMed Central initiative in the USA, it will not aim to centralize published information, nor will it presuppose that content owned by others will necessarily be accessible to users free of charge. E-BioSci will also offer web-hosting and archiving facilities for digital publications that meet its standards of scientific and technical quality.

E-BioSci policy and the monitoring of its activities will be the task of the newly appointed EMBO E-BioSci committee, whose members represent the worlds of publishing, bio-informatics, information technology and biological research. The Scientific Content committee will be responsible for the scientific scope and quality control. The Technical committee will be responsible for formulation and standardization of protocols to be used in various services, including bibliographic database construction, maintenance, together with linking and search technologies. I am convinced that the European life scientists look forward to the public platform of information that will be offered by E-BioSci in the near future.

Les Grivell

Day to day management of the project is in the hands of the author, Les Grivell, who until recently headed his own molecular biology research group at the University of Amsterdam and has now joined EMBO to take on the challenge of getting E-BioSci off the ground. The Publications Committee of FEBS has decided to make the contents of *European Journal of Biochemistry* and *FEBS Letters* freely available after twelve months of the publication date. This decision is effective as of July 1st, 2001.

Matti Saraste