Subject: Submission of information on synthetic biology and nomination of experts to participate in the Open-ended Online Forum on Synthetic Biology

(Ref.: SCBD/CP/DC/MA/MW/87791)

With regard to Notification 2018-103, Japan would like to submit its view on the relationship between synthetic biology and the criteria set out in decision IX/29, paragraph 12 as follows:

In relation to criterion (a), Japan notes the conclusion of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Synthetic Biology that most living organisms already developed or currently under research and development through techniques of synthetic biology, including organisms containing engineered gene drives, fell under the definition of living modified organisms (LMOs) as per the Cartagena Protocol. It is a matter of course that such living organisms have relevance to the implementation of the objectives of the Convention and its existing programmes of work, when they are regarded within the scope of the Protocol. As such, Japan believes that the fact that such living organisms meet criterion (a) does not support the possibility that synthetic biology is a new and emerging issue. It rather indicates that synthetic biology is an existing issue.

With regard to criteria (b), (c), (d), (f) and (g), transfer, handling and use of living organisms resulting from synthetic biology that are within the scope of the Protocol is subject to the regulations under the Protocol. Accordingly, focus should be placed on other living organisms, components and products of synthetic biology that are not covered by the Protocol in consideration. However, such living organisms, components and products have not yet been identified well, and therefore Japan does not have any information either on their impacts on biodiversity, human well-being, and productive sectors and economic well-being, on the risk caused by them, or on their geographic coverage and potential spread.

As to criterion (e), existing tools developed under the Protocol are applicable to living organisms of synthetic biology that are within the scope of the Protocol. Some tools may be also applicable to other living organisms, components and products of synthetic biology that are not covered by the Protocol. It is not sure whether there is a need for a new specific tool for such living organisms, components and products, since we have not identified them well yet.

In conclusion, Japan believes that there is no firm evidence which supports the possibility that synthetic biology is a new and emerging issue and that the issues related to synthetic biology, when relevant, should be considered within the existing framework of the Protocol to avoid duplicative work.