

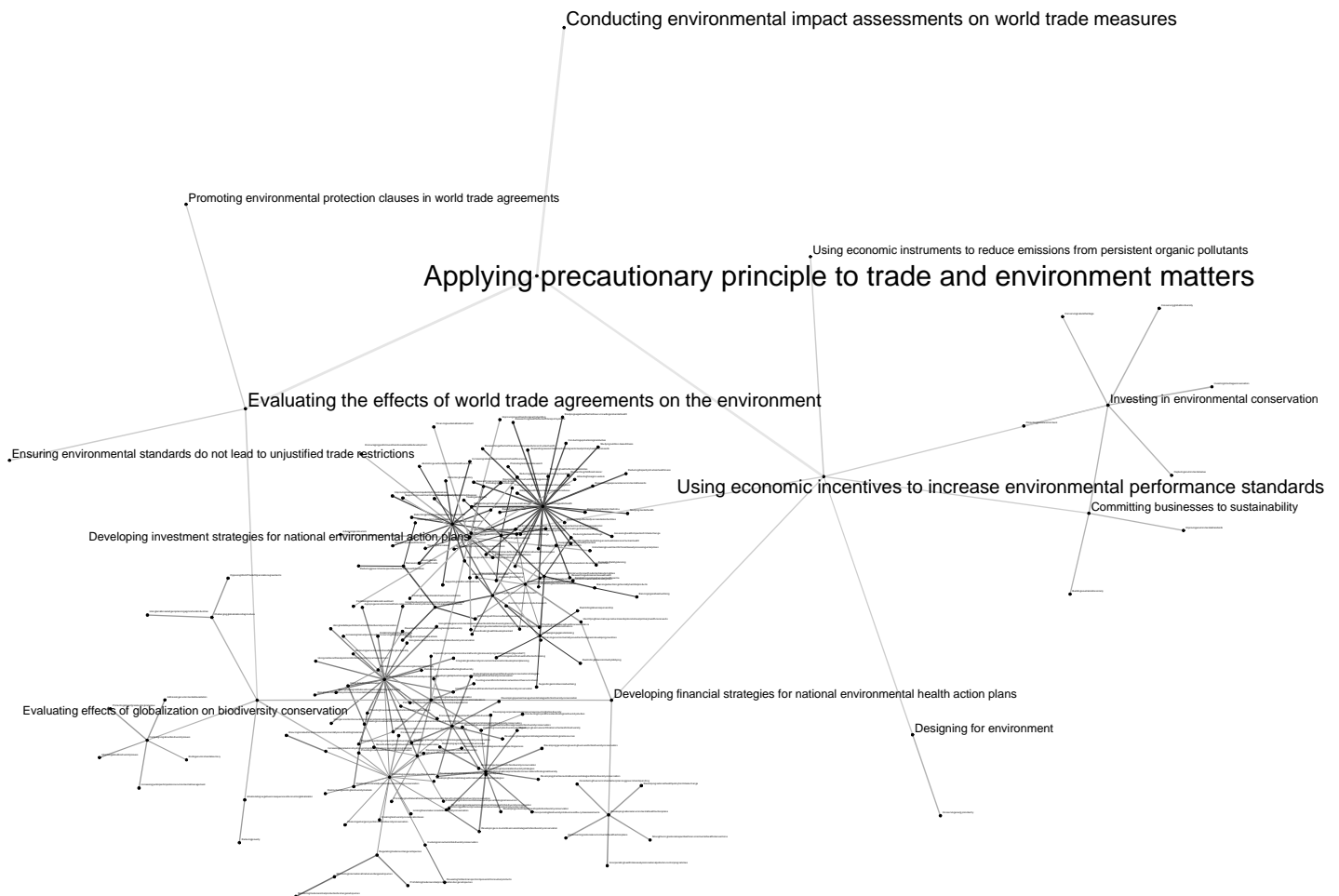
Figure 10.3.10. Applying precautionary principle to trade and environment matters

Database: Global Strategies and Solutions

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The relationship between the precautionary principle and World Trade Organization (WTO) rules is an area of potential conflict. The precautionary principle legitimises the need to act (for example, to ban or to restrict a product), even in the absence of conclusive scientific evidence, and even on the basis of a qualitative but not quantitative scientific assessment of risk, in order to protect public health or the environment. The precautionary principle is thus by definition an issue where available evidence does not permit a full risk assessment approach on the lines embedded in Article 5 of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement (SPSA) which requires justification on the basis of scientific evidence. Article 5.7 of the SPSA does however embed the precautionary approach in WTO, at least for health-related issues. The 1999 dispute between the US and EU on imports of beef treated with growth hormones illustrated an international problem arising from different assessments of the precautionary issue. Genetically modified food raises similar issues.