

(54) Title of the Invention: **lonomeric cross-linkers and membranes formed therefrom**

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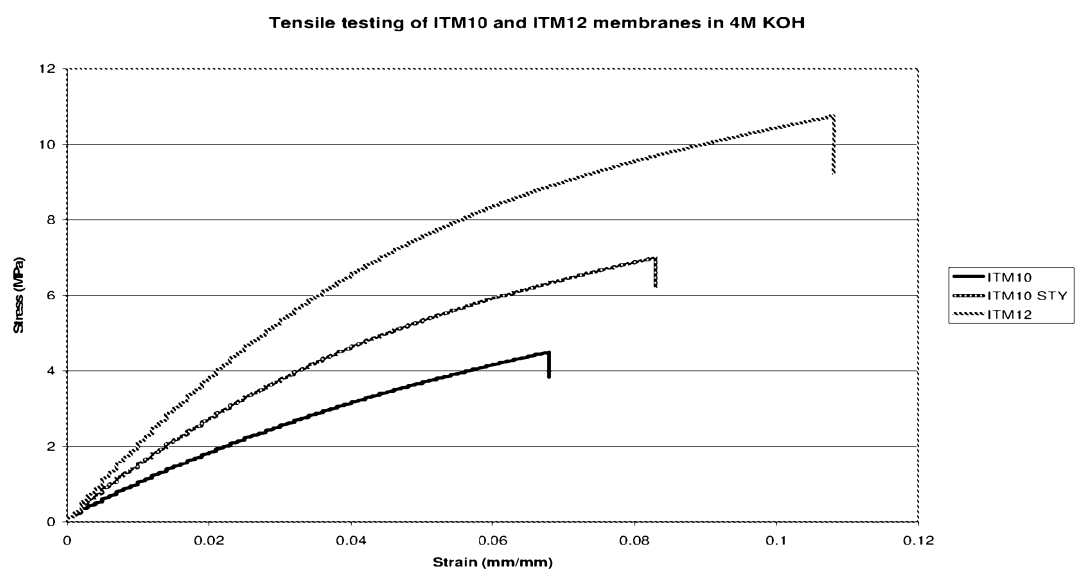


Figure 1

**Electrolyser testing of increased styrene content membranes with different cross linkers,
SS:Ni, 4M KOH, 60°C, 1A/cm².**

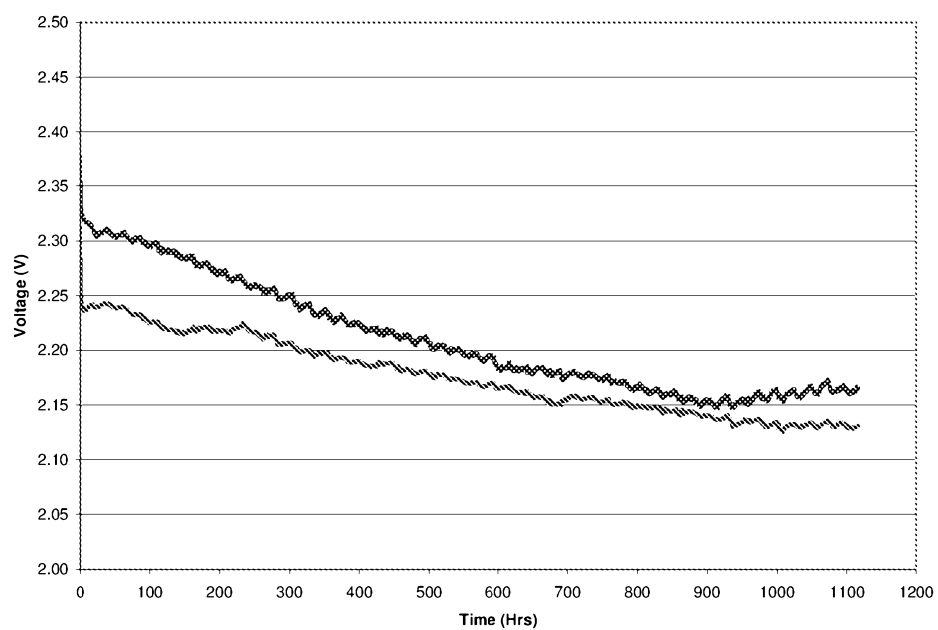


Figure 2

IONOMERIC CROSS-LINKERS AND MEMBRANES FORMED THEREFROM

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to cross-linkers, suitable for linking polymer
5 chains, and suitable for use in polymer membranes.

Background of the Invention

It is desirable to cross link polymer membranes, in particular hydrophilic
polymer membranes, in order to make them stable in electrochemical cells. One
cross-linker that is commonly used in anionic membranes is divinylbenzene
10 (DVB). There is a need for an improved cross-linker, for use in polymer
membranes.

Summary of the Invention

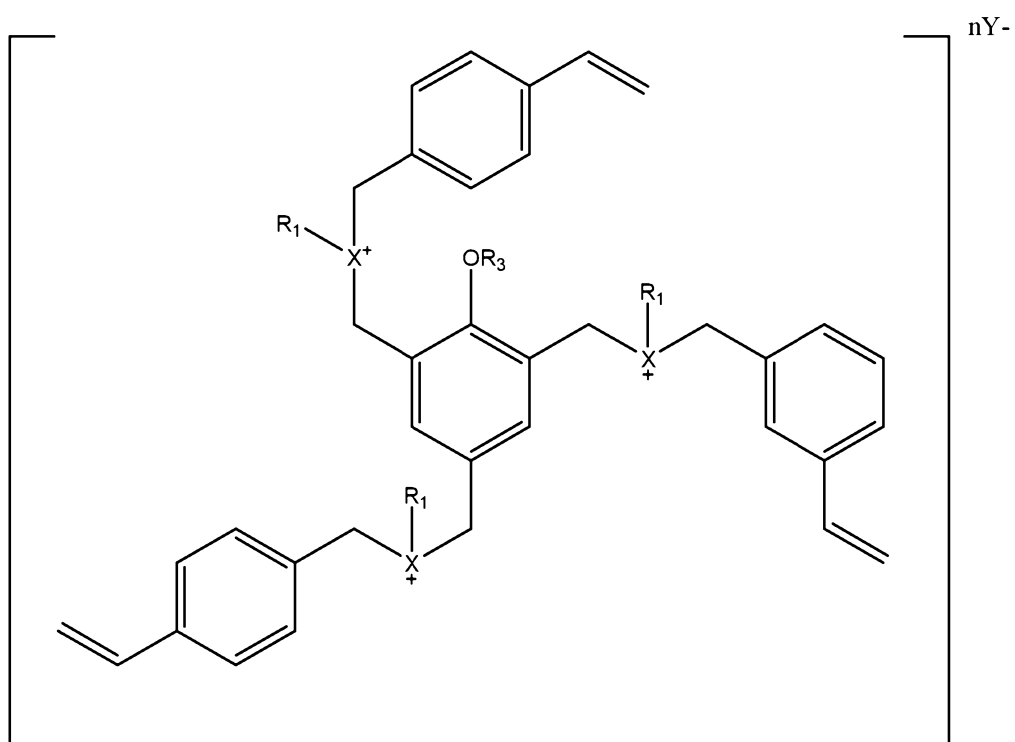
It has been surprisingly found that polymer membranes having certain
covalently bonded ionic groups are excellent cross-linkers. They produce
15 membranes with superior mechanical properties, greater ionic capacity and
greater control of hydration properties.

The principle application for the invention is to enable the development of
a solid polymer alkaline electrolyser, which can utilise much lower cost catalyst
compare to conventional solid acidic electrochemistry.

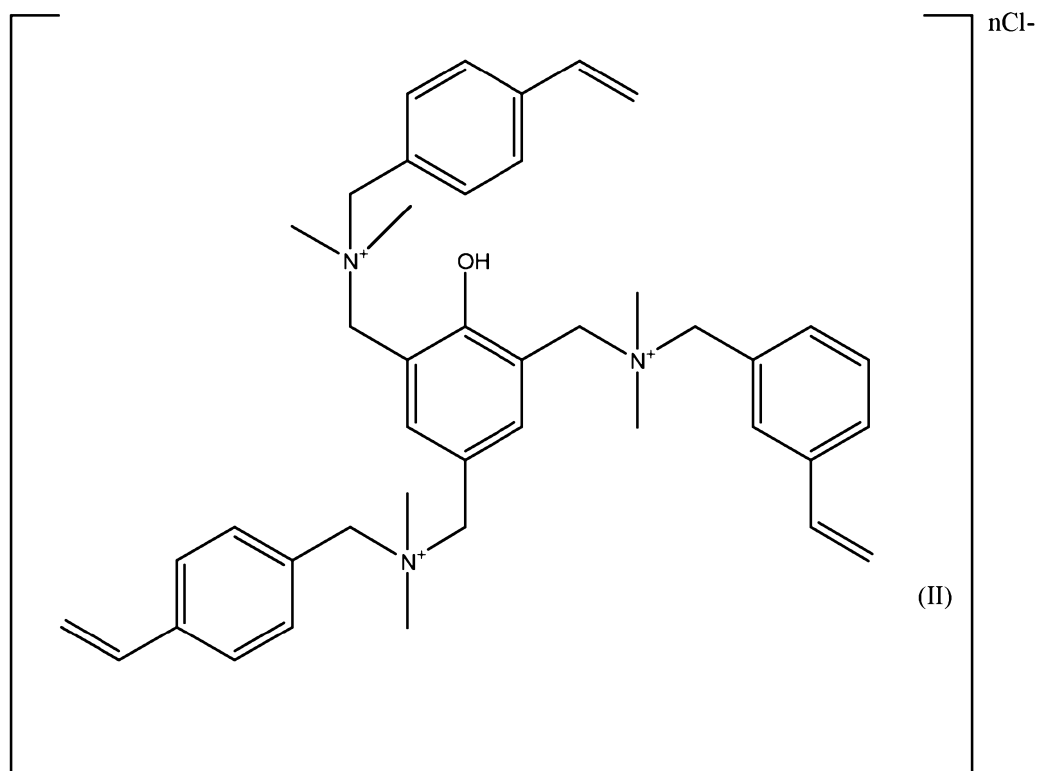
20 According to a first aspect, a compound comprising two or more
covalently bonded polymerisable vinyl groups and one or more covalently
bonded ionic groups selected from a quaternary ammonium group; a quaternary
phosphonium group; or a tertiary sulphonium group, is used as an ionic cross-
linker.

25 According to a second aspect, a compound has the formula I or II:

2



(I)



According to a third aspect, an ionomeric membrane is formed from the polymerisation of a compound as defined above, and optionally other monomers.

According to a fourth aspect, a method of producing a compound as defined in above comprises reacting a compound having a reactive alkyl halide group with a molecule containing two or more ionic groups selected from a tertiary trialkyl amine group, a tertiary trialkyl phosphine group or a secondary dialkyl sulphide group.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments

As used herein, an alkyl group can be straight-chain or branched, and contains from 1 to 6 carbon atoms, preferably 1 to 4 carbon atoms. It includes groups such as methyl, ethyl, isopropyl and t-butyl.

The compounds of the invention are useful as cross-linkers. Preferably, they are used to cross-link hydrophilic membranes. Preferably they are used to cross-link anionic membranes. These membranes may be used in an electrolyser or a fuel cell. Preferably, they are used in an electrolyser.

Preferably, the compound comprises 2 or 3 covalently bonded polymerisable vinyl groups.

Preferably, the compound comprises 1, 2 or 3 covalently bonded ionic groups.

In a preferred embodiment, the covalently bonded ionic group is a quaternary ammonium group.

The compounds of formula I and II are useful as a cross-linker.

In a preferred embodiment, a cross-linker of the invention is used to cross-link an anionic membrane.

In a preferred embodiment, an ionomeric membrane is formed from the polymerisation of a compound as defined above, one or more monomers comprising a cationic group, preferably selected from a quaternary ammonium group; a quaternary phosphonium group; or a tertiary sulphonium group and/or one or more non-ionic monomers.

Preferably, the one or more monomers comprising a cationic group includes vinylbenzyltrimethylammonium chloride (BV) and/or the one or more non-ionic monomers includes styrene.

Preferably, an ionomeric membrane of the invention is formed from components comprising a polymerisation initiator, preferably a UV initiator such as UV8.

Any suitable polymerisation process can be used to form an ionomer of the invention. Preferably, polymerisation is by thermal or UV.

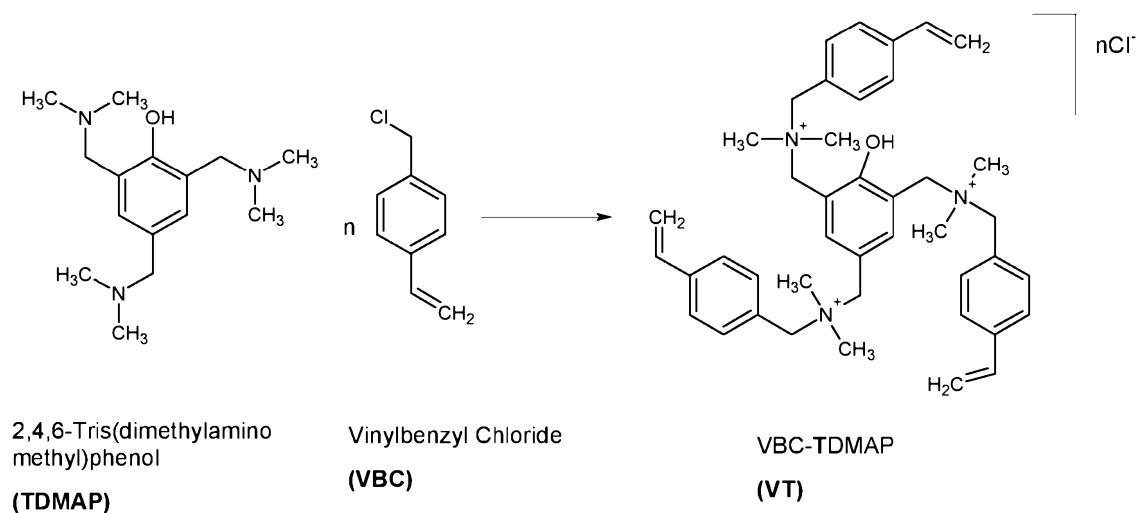
The ionomeric membranes of the invention are preferably polymerised from their monomers/cross-linking monomers using UV irradiation.

5 A method of producing a cross-linker of the invention comprises reacting a compound having a reactive alkyl halide group with a molecule containing two or more ionic groups selected from a tertiary trialkyl amine group, a tertiary trialkyl phosphine group or a secondary dialkyl sulphide group.

10 In a preferred embodiment, the molecule containing two or more ionic groups is Tris(dimethylaminomethyl)phenol (TDMAP), 1,4-Diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane (DABCO), tetramethylthiourea, tetramethylurea or 1,3,5-Trimethylhexahydro-1,3,5-triazine (TMHHT).

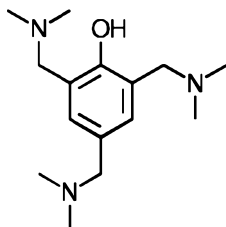
The reaction may be carried out in any solvent. Preferably, the reaction is carried out in a polar solvent. More preferably, the solvent is an alcohol, most
15 preferably methanol.

In one embodiment, the reaction is:

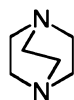


20 The TDMAP may be substituted by 1,4-Diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane (DABCO), tetramethylthiourea, tetramethylurea or 1,3,5-Trimethylhexahydro-1,3,5-triazine (TMHHT). The skilled person will know suitable reaction conditions for carrying out these reactions, and the reaction shown above.

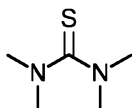
The structures of the tertiary amines mentioned above are:



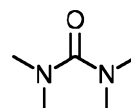
**Tris(dimethylaminomethyl)phenol
(TDMAP)**



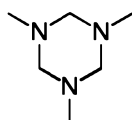
**1,4-Diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane
(DABCO)**



Tetramethylthiourea



Tetramethylurea



**1,3,5-Trimethylhexahydro-1,3,5-triazine
(TMHHT)**

Without wishing to be bound by theory, the reactions above are preferably carried out in polar solvents (e.g. alcohols) as the use of non-polar solvents results in the precipitation of the resultant ionic species. The use of methanol allows the production of the cross-linker as a highly concentrated solution (ca. 70%). The solid ionic cross-linker is not isolated but used directly as the produced methanolic solution.

The membranes produced using the cross-linkers of the invention have superior mechanical properties, greater ionic capacity and greater control of hydration properties.

The invention will now be illustrated by the following example.

5 Example

Experimental for forming an anionic membrane according to the invention:

2,4,6-Tris(dimethylaminomethyl)phenol (TDMAP) (8.46 g, 31.9 mmol) and methanol (10.87 g) were placed in a round bottom flask fitted with a magnetic stirrer, thermometer and pressure equalising dropping funnel. The solution was
 10 cooled to below 10°C in an ice bath. Purified vinylbenzyl chloride (VBC) (95.9 mmol) was added dropwise maintaining the temperature below 15°C. When the addition was complete the reaction mixture was allowed to warm to room temperature in the ice bath and stirred overnight. To the ionic cross-linker (VBC-TDMAP) solution was added methanol (10.87 g), styrene (24.17 g, 23.2 mmol)
 15 and vinylbenzyltrimethylammonium chloride (BV) (30.22 g, 142.7 mmol). The mixture was stirred until completely dissolved. UV8 (0.78g, 3.8mmol) was added and again stirred until completely dissolved.

The mixture was sealed in a UHMW polyethylene bag and cure under a UV lamp at 100% intensity for 23 minutes.

20 The membrane formed is called ITM12. Following the same method, but substituting DVB for VBC-TDMAP, formed ITM10.

Membrane testing:

Figures 1 and 2 show the results of the membrane tests.

In Figure 1, the top trace is for ITM12, the middle trace is for ITM10 with
 25 styrene added, and the bottom trace is for ITM010.

ITM10 membrane is a hydrophilic membrane, which is cross-linked using DVB. This is the comparative example.

ITM12 membrane is a hydrophilic membrane, which is cross-linked using VT, i.e. a compound of the invention.

30 Tensile testing of ITM10 membranes show a stress at break of 4.5 MPa and a strain at break of 7% indicative of the weak brittle membrane it is. The addition of more styrene to ITM10 slightly increases both the stress and the strain at break. The ITM12 membrane has both increased stress and strain over the DVB cross-linked membranes.

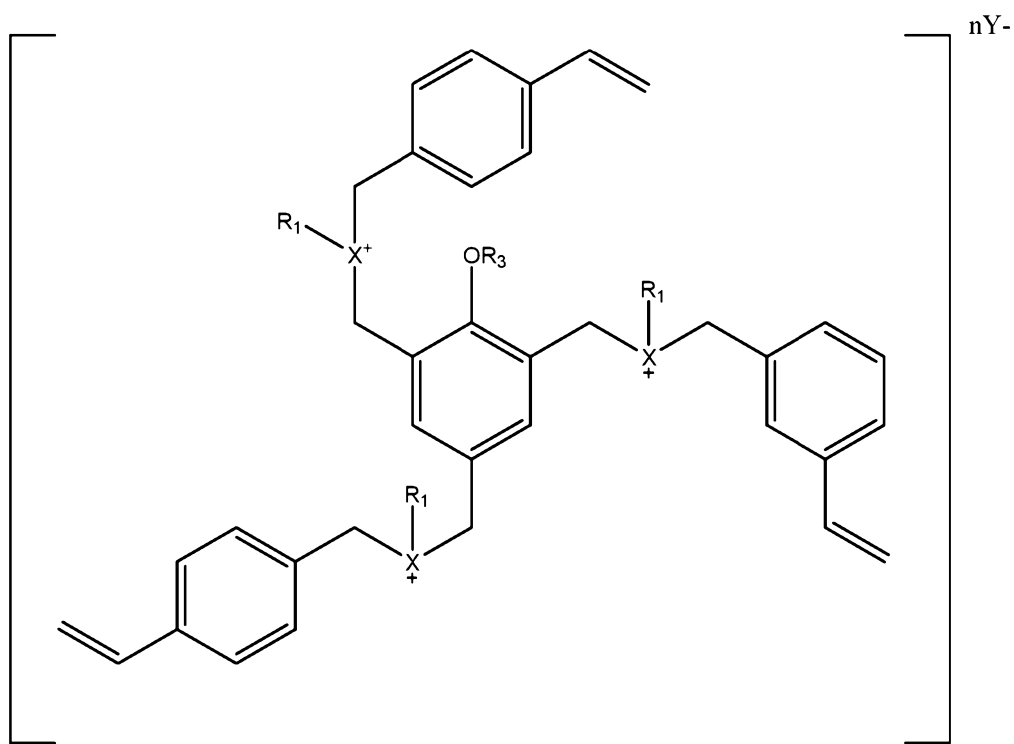
Electrolyser efficiency is shown in Figure 2. Electrolyser efficiency is improved for the ionic cross-linked membrane (ITM12) when compared with the DVB cross-linked membrane (ITM10). ITM10 is the top trace on Figure 1 and ITM12 is the bottom trace.

CLAIMS

1. Use of a compound comprising two or more covalently bonded polymerisable vinyl groups and one or more covalently bonded ionic groups, as
5 an ionic cross-linker;

wherein the one or more ionic groups is a quaternary ammonium group selected from one or more of quaternized Tris(dimethylaminomethyl)phenol (TDMAP), 1,4-Diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane (DABCO), tetramethylthiourea, tetramethylurea or 1,3,5-Trimethylhexahydro-1,3,5-triazine (TMHHT).

- 10 2. Use according to claim 1, wherein the compound comprises 2 or 3 covalently bonded polymerisable vinyl groups.
3. Use according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the compound comprises 1, 2 or 3 covalently bonded ionic groups.
4. Use according to any preceding claim, wherein the compound has the
15 formula I:



(I)

- 20 wherein:

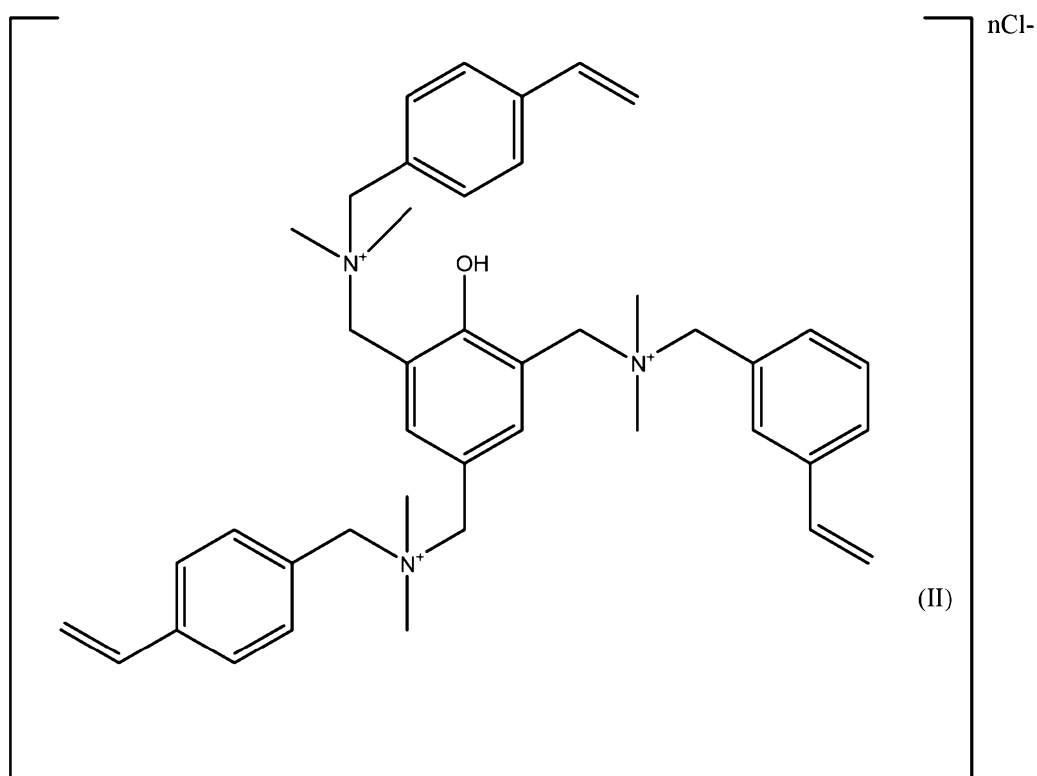
X is NR_2 , PR_2 or S;

each R_1 and R_2 is independently C_1 to C_6 alkyl;

R_3 is H or C_1 to C_6 alkyl; and

Y is a counterion.

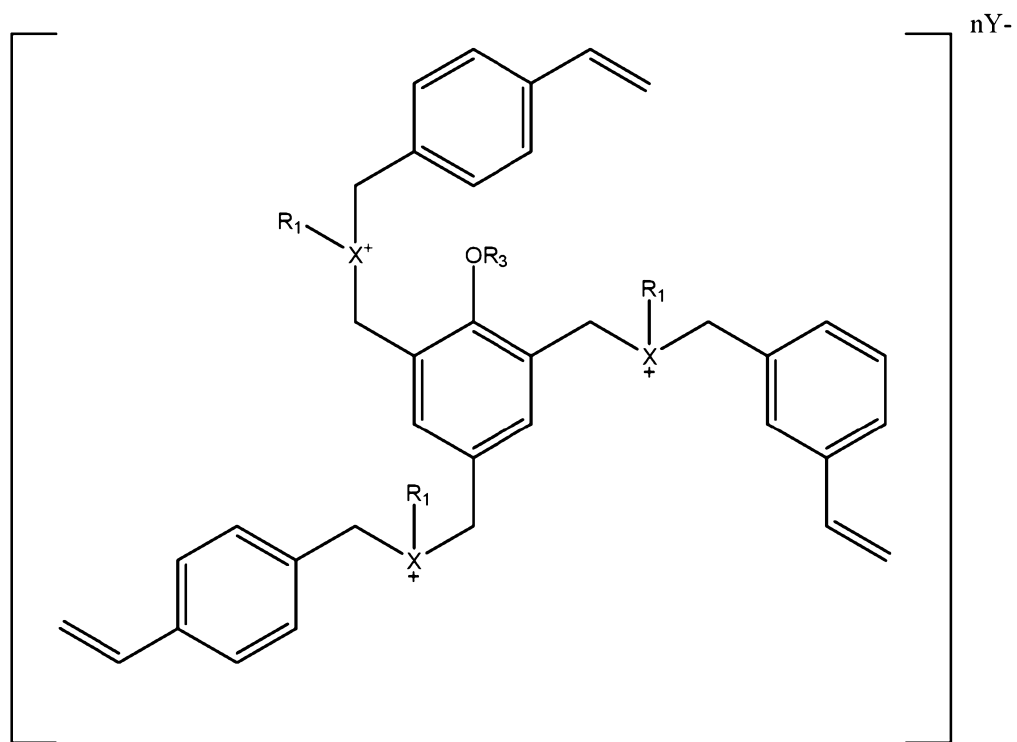
5. Use of a compound according to any preceding claim, which has the formula II:



10

6. Use according to any preceding claim, wherein the cross-linker is used to cross-link an anionic membrane.

7. A compound of formula I



(I)

wherein:

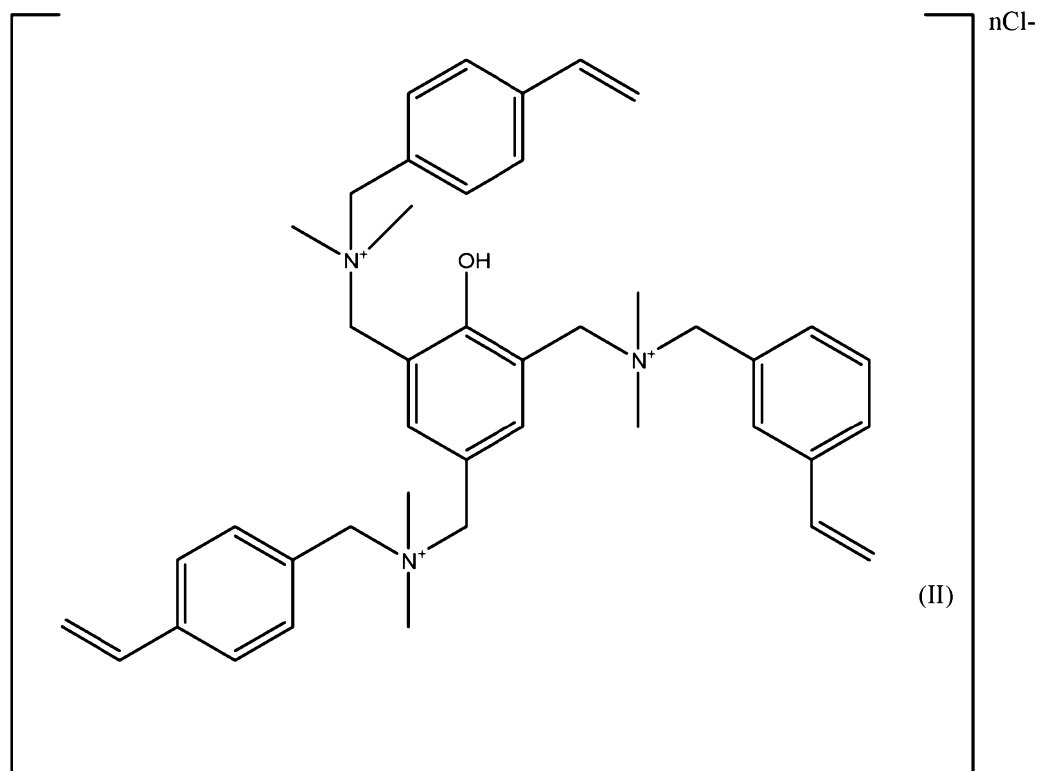
X is NR_2 , PR_2 or S;

5 each R_1 and R_2 is independently C_1 to C_6 alkyl;

R_3 is H or C_1 to C_6 alkyl; and

Y is a counterion;

or which has the formula II



8. An ionomeric membrane formed from the polymerisation of a compound as defined in any of claims 1 to 5, and optionally other monomers.

5 9. An ionomeric membrane according to claim 8, formed from the polymerisation of a compound as defined in any of claims 1 to 5, one or more monomers comprising a cationic group, preferably selected from a quaternary ammonium group; a quaternary phosphonium group; or a tertiary sulphonium group and/or one or more non-ionic monomers.

10 10. An ionomeric membrane according to claim 9, wherein the one or more monomers comprising a cationic group includes vinylbenzyltrimethylammonium chloride (BV) and/or the one or more non-ionic monomers includes styrene.

11. A method of producing a compound as defined in any of the preceding claims comprising reacting a compound having a reactive alkyl halide group with
15 a molecule containing two or more ionic groups selected from a tertiary trialkyl amine group, a tertiary trialkyl phosphine group or a secondary dialkyl sulphide group.

12. A method according to claim 11, wherein the molecule containing two or more ionic groups is Tris(dimethylaminomethyl)phenol (TDMAP), 1,4-

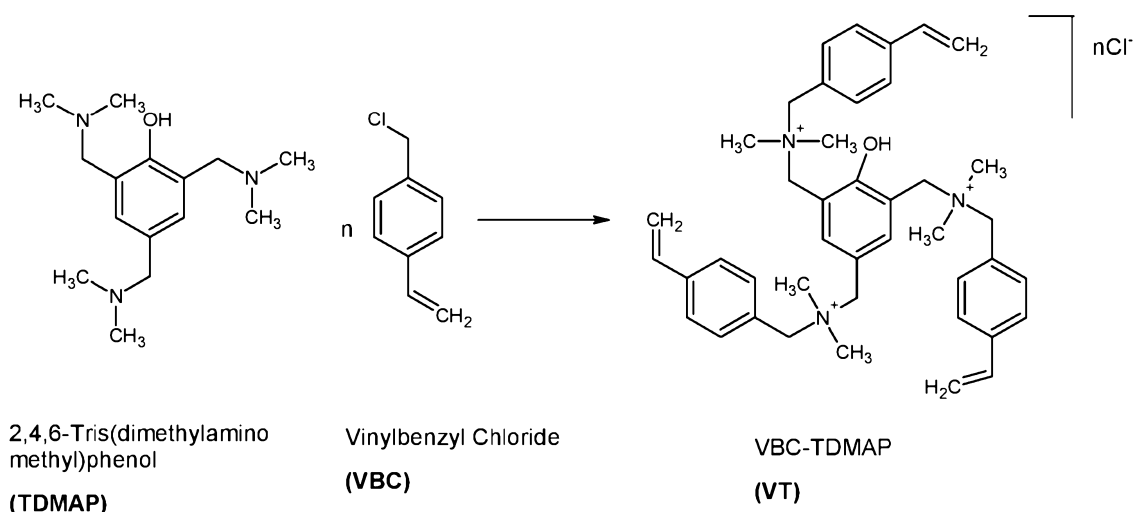
Diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane (DABCO), tetramethylthiourea, tetramethylurea or 1,3,5-Trimethylhexahydro-1,3,5-triazine (TMHHT).

13. A method according to claim 11 or claim 12, wherein the reaction is carried out in a polar solvent.

5 14. A method according to claim 13, wherein the solvent is an alcohol.

15. A method according to claim 14, wherein the solvent is methanol.

16. A method according to any of claims 11 to 15, wherein the reaction is:



10 17. A method according to claim 16, wherein the TDMAP is substituted by 1,4-Diazabicyclo[2.2.2]octane (DABCO), tetramethylthiourea, tetramethylurea or 1,3,5-Trimethylhexahydro-1,3,5-triazine (TMHHT).