

GM SCIENCE REVIEW PANEL

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTH MEETING

Thursday 24 June 2003

The Royal Institution of Great Britain, 21 Albemarle Street London W1

THE MEETING WAS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC TO OBSERVE

Present

Members

Sir David King (**Chair**)
Dr Mark Avery
Professor Janet Bainbridge
Dr Chitra Bharucha
Professor Diana Bowles
Dr Simon Bright
Dr Andrew Cockburn
Professor Mick Crawley
Professor Philip Dale
Professor Mike Gale
Professor Mike Gasson
Professor Alan Gray

Professor John Gray
Professor Pat Heslop-Harrison
Ms Julie Hill
Dr Brian Johnson
Professor Chris Leaver
Professor Jules Pretty
Bert Rima
Professor Bernard Silverman
Dr Andrew Stirling
Professor William Sutherland
Professor Michael Wilson
Professor Peter Young

Secretariat

Dr Adrian Butt (**Secretary**), OST/DEFRA
Ms Maia Gedde, OST

Mr Richard Pitts, OST
Dr Louise Ball, OST

Apologies

1. Apologies were received from Revd. Professor Michael Reiss.

Chairman's opening remarks

2. Sir David King welcomed Panel members and observers from the public to the seventh Science Review Panel meeting and congratulated Diana Bowles and Alan Gray on the award of their OBEs. Observers were invited to join the Panel for lunch.

3. The aim of the meeting was to review each chapter of the second draft of the report in turn and resolve any outstanding issues. The work of the individual editors for each of the papers was now complete and the Panel now needed to progress to the point where they could take on collective ownership, with the Secretariat responsible for further changes based on Members' views.

1. Minutes of the sixth meeting (5 June)

4. After correction of a minor typographical error, the minutes of the sixth meeting were confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Matters arising

5. In response to a query about the Panel's second report later in the year and the publication of the Farm Scale Evaluation (FSE) results, Sir David King said that the FSE results were important and that the Panel should aim to take account of them in the second report. The Panel needed to meet in the autumn to discuss the science aspects of the outcome of the public debate, to consider comments on the first report and to consider any developments in the science since July.

6. The Chairman reported that Andrew Stirling had pointed out, that, in relation to the freedom of Members to contribute fully, as with any advisory committee, the GM Science Review Panel by its nature involved engagement from a number of divergent scientific perspectives. It depended fundamentally for its success on members being able to contribute in good faith, without fears that clandestine attempts may be made to undermine their research, their professional standing or their funding. The cumulative effect of such fears might easily serve to suppress open discussion, reasoned argument and substantive criticism of the kind whose importance the Chairman had many times emphasised. Ultimately, such behaviour by individuals in privileged academic or regulatory positions threatened seriously to compromise the credibility and proper functioning of the science advice system. The Panel strongly endorsed this.

7. The Chairman added that he understood from Andrew Stirling that someone with an association with the Science Review had not been acting in this spirit and that if this was the case the Chair deplored it. The Panel concurred. Andrew Stirling subsequently made it clear that the individual concerned was not a member of the Science Review Panel.

Secretary's update

8. The Secretary highlighted the main changes in the second draft of the report, outlined the timetable until publication, which was expected to be around mid-July, and what still needed to be done. Sir David King said he expected to lead a media briefing with the assistance of a few Panel members and a press release would be circulated in advance for Members to comment on. It was agreed that, if members of the Panel were approached individually by the media to talk about the report before its publication, then they were free to speak in a personal capacity about the review process. However, it would be inappropriate at this stage to comment on the content of the report when it had not yet been finalised.

3. The Report – second draft

9. The Panel began by working its way through the Report, discussing the relevant parts of the executive summary after the chapters to which they referred.

Introductory chapter

10. At present this section introduced the GM Science Review and then explained the regulatory framework and risk assessment. It was agreed that this latter regulatory and risk material would be better incorporated into a new chapter explaining the role of science in the regulatory process. This would also include an explanation of substantial equivalence. The Panel discussed the content of this new chapter (and the equivalent sections in the executive summary) and the level of detail that would be most appropriate. It was agreed that the Report should explain that various members of the Panel had an authorship role in the early phases of the Review, evolving into an editorship role as Panel members interacted and exchanged views, and finally the Secretariat took on the role of mediator.

Methodology chapter

11. The most significant change to this chapter was a revised diagram of the GM Science Review process, which was accepted subject to a few minor alterations.

12. The contributions to the Forum on the GM Science Review website had provided a resource for the Review. This did not mean that every single entry was acknowledged in the draft report, but Sir David King said that the foreword should acknowledge that the Panel had sought to take account of these submissions. It should also say that differences of views were respected, but that a good degree of consensus was reached and the Panel had collectively taken ownership of the Review.

Reliability chapter

13. Members were broadly content with the chapter 'How Reliable is GM Plant Breeding?', but some felt that it dwelled disproportionately on the rather narrow interpretation of the concept of reliability in relation to discard rates. It was felt that issues around the possibility of unintended traits which do not show up until later stages in the development/implementation process, or which are expressed only in certain environmental contexts, should be mentioned in the next draft.

Review chapters

14. When considering the draft chapter on 'GM Derived Food and Animal Feed Safety', Members focused on the section dealing with 'Possible Nutritional and Toxicological Differences in GM Food'. Discussion covered: the difficulties in assessing long-term health effects; the degree of international consensus on the scientific principles underlying the safety assessment of GM foods and the adequacy of the existing regulatory framework; and the extent to which the Report should cover the future development of 'functional foods'.

15. Discussion on the draft 'Environmental Impacts' Chapter focused on the sections on 'Development of Resistance' and 'Changes to Agricultural Practices'. The possible merits of combining the 'Horizon Scanning' and 'Changes to Agricultural Practices' sections were again raised, with members differing in their opinions. It was agreed that this would be resolved through discussions after the meeting, as not all the members involved were present. Comments on papers not discussed would be circulated after the meeting and the Secretariat would be responsible for revising the text.

16. The Panel considered the draft chapter on 'Gene Flow, Detection and Impact of GM Crops' and was broadly content with the sections considering 'Gene Flow Between Crop

Varieties' and 'Gene Flow from GM Crops to Agricultural Weeds and Wild Relatives', however it considered that more information on (trans)gene stacking was needed. It was suggested that a new paper (gene flow, detection and impact of GM crops) should be considered that would address what gene flow is and why it might matter. The Secretariat agreed to cover these points in the introduction where they were not dealt with elsewhere. The Panel was broadly content with the papers considering the possibility and consequences of gene flow from GM crops to viruses and soil microbes. There was a discussion of what information from these various sections should be included in the executive summary.

4. Any other business

17. None.

5. Date and time of next meeting

18. This was the last meeting of the Panel prior to publication of its first report. It will reconvene in the autumn 2003.

**GM Science Review Secretariat
July 2003**