

PRIME MINISTER

Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group (GMAG)

Sir Keith Joseph wants to wind up the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group and establish an Advisory Committee of the Health and Safety Commission to take over its functions. The main reason for doing so is the growing importance of industrial biotechnology.

GMAG has done a very good job in restoring public confidence in biotechnology (see Robin Nicholson's note at A). It is vital that its successor should maintain this record.

Agree that the Secretary of State should announce the winding up of GMAG, and the establishment of an HSC Advisory Group?

DMS

16 December 1983

I see no reason for
the change. I should have
thought that the CMAA
had a higher reputation than
the HSC Commission. No do
I see good reason in the paper -
only certain assurances

ms

CF: file please.
DMS
19/12

1.



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

20 December, 1983

GENETIC MANIPULATION ADVISORY GROUP

The Prime Minister has considered your Secretary of State's minute of 13 December, in which he proposed the winding up of the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group and the establishment in its place of an HSC Advisory Committee.

Br // The Prime Minister considers that the case for this change has not been made out. She would have thought that the CMAG had a higher reputation than the Health and Safety Commission, and she does not see sufficient reason in your Secretary of State's minute for the transfer. I should be grateful for further advice.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the recipients of your Secretary of State's minute.

(David Barclay)

Ms L. Olney,
Department of Education and Science

VC

MR DAVID BARCLAY, No 10

GENETIC MANIPULATION ADVISORY GROUP (GMAG)

I have followed the discussions which have been going on for the last few months on the winding up of GMAG and its replacement by an Advisory Committee for the HSC (ACGM).

I am content both with the general approach to the new body and with the consultation process which has occurred prior to its being set up.

2. I think it is worth recording that GMAG has been an extraordinarily successful operation. It is hard to remember now that when it was set up there was widespread concern about genetic manipulation which was threatening both the conduct of scientific research and the exploitation of that research in this country. There is now widespread confidence that the risks are being properly assessed and contained, with the result that some of the leading research in the world in this area is carried out in this country and we have a growing biotechnology industry. That is the measure of GMAG's achievement and I hope that there will be some public recognition of this when GMAG is wound up. The UK's record in handling this whole area compares favourably with a number of other countries. We have neither over-reacted nor under-reacted.

3. Nevertheless, the need for continued success in this area is paramount and GMAG's success will be a measure of ACGM's task. I need hardly point out that a single "scare" or accident in this area of technology would have very

damaging consequences and there is a terrible example of the civil nuclear industry before us, which has moved from a clean bright futuristic image in the late 1950s to its present sorry state in only 25 years. It will be the responsibility of the ACGM together with the scientists and industrialists working in biotechnology to ensure that the technology maintains or improves its current image so that it can realise its full potential in the country's economic growth.

I am copying this minute to Sir Robert Armstrong.

RBN.

ROBIN B NICHOLSON
Chief Scientific Adviser

Social
Services
SNAS

16 JUL 1983

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