



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

MR HATFIELD

Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group

The Prime Minister has now considered Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 19 December about the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group, in the light of the further minute of 10 January on this subject from the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

The Prime Minister has agreed that the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group should be wound up, and that an Advisory Committee to the Health and Safety Commission should be established in its place. She also agrees that lead ministerial responsibility on genetic manipulation matters should be transferred from the Secretary of State for Education and Science to the Secretary of State for Employment, and that this transfer should be announced at the same time as the abolition of the GMAG.

David Barclay

11 January 1984



C CF: Please let when DES
replied to my request
for further advice

Ref. A083/3498

PRIME MINISTER

DMS
20/12

Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group:
Proposed Re-Constitution

In a minute dated December 13 the Secretary of State for Education and Science seeks your agreement to the replacement of the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group (GMAG) by a new Advisory Committee on Genetic Manipulation, reporting to the Health and Safety Commission.

2. When GMAG was last re-constituted, at the end of 1980, you questioned the continuing justification for an advisory body on this subject. In the light of your previous interest, I have asked the Machinery of Government Division of the Cabinet Office to discuss the present proposal with officials concerned in DES and HSE. Their conclusion is that the proposal is sound: outside advice will clearly continue to be needed on changes in control procedures required to take account of developments in experimentation and use, and on the risks of, and precautions appropriate to, new techniques. A number of important issues currently claiming attention are mentioned in paragraph 6 of the Secretary of State for Education and Science's minute. The main arguments for a permanent, independent body (as opposed to reliance on ad hoc advice) are, first, the importance of consistency and, second, the capacity of an independent body to "hold the ring" in conflicts of interest between scientific/industrial interests on the one hand, and those whose health may be affected on the other. HSE point out that the tri-partite approach has materially assisted in the progressive dismantling of restrictions on genetic manipulation work achieved in recent years. Resource costs are small: the Committee will meet infrequently (certainly no more than once a quarter).

3. Though the submission does not make this clear, the Secretary of State for Education and Science has also agreed with the Secretary of State for Employment that, subject to your

approval, lead Ministerial responsibility on genetic manipulation matters should be transferred from him to the Secretary of State for Employment, simultaneously with the creation of the new body. GMAG was originally placed under the Secretary of State for Education and Science because genetic manipulation was then at the research stage. The emphasis has since shifted towards application, and HSC/E have built up expertise through their involvement in administering the Health and Safety (Genetic Manipulation) Regulations adopted in 1978. Against this background, the proposed transfer of lead responsibility to the HSE's sponsoring Minister seems reasonable. Ministers concerned with Health, Agriculture, Environment, Industry and Northern Ireland aspects of genetic manipulation would however continue to answer on these aspects. The change in lead Ministerial responsibility obviously needs to be made clear in the "inspired" PQ which DES propose.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

19 December 1983