

A

PRIME MINISTER

## GENETIC MANIPULATION ADVISORY GROUP (GMAG)

1. As you will be aware, this Department and the Health and Safety Executive conducted consultations earlier this year on the future of GMAG. In the light of the responses received, and with the support of colleagues in other interested Departments and of the Health and Safety Commission, I now wish to announce the winding-up of GMAG and the establishment in its place of an HSC advisory committee to be known as the Advisory Committee on Genetic Manipulation (ACGM).

2. The review of the role of GMAG begun by DES and HSE officials last year was timely for a number of reasons. There was an emerging consensus among experts that early fears about the risks inherent in genetic manipulation work - fears which had led the Secretary of State for Education and Science at the time to establish GMAG in 1976 - had proved largely unfounded. GMAG had thus found it possible to exclude much of the scientific and industrial work which was going on (but by no means all of it) from any requirements for prior scrutiny. At the same time, it was apparent that large scale industrial use of manipulated organisms was increasing and would continue to increase, making it desirable that GMAG should work even more closely with HSE - whose knowledge of the physical containment aspects of these processes had grown considerably - in the interests of reducing interference with industrial development to the necessary minimum.

3. The review took account of the known views of the CBI and the TUC, the views of the members of GMAG itself and the views of government departments with an interest, or potential interest, in GMAG's field of work. These departments included health,



agriculture, environment, industry and, of course, the Department of Employment and HSE. The consensus of opinion was that an advisory body on genetic manipulation would continue to be needed. It was needed primarily to advise HSE and HSC on the discharge of their responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act and regulations made thereunder, but also to provide scientific and technical advice to interested Ministers on genetic manipulation questions arising within their respective fields.

4. Of the various options which were considered, the replacement of the existing GMAG by an advisory committee to the HSC appeared the most appropriate to current and future circumstances and needs, and the solution likely to commend the widest general support. The consultations conducted this year bear out that assessment. Almost all the bodies which responded (representing scientific, technological, industrial and professional interests) were in favour of the proposed ACGM and with the terms of reference, appointment and membership arrangements suggested for it, a copy of which I now attach. In so far as there was any comment on the proposals, it related mainly to the operation of the notification system for genetic manipulation work and the scope of the regulations governing this. These are matters which the new Committee can look at when it is established.

5. Subsequently, I informed colleagues of the results of the consultative exercise and I believe them to be content with what is suggested. The HSC, at its meeting on 8 November last, similarly, expressed itself content to proceed to establish the new advisory committee - as it is empowered to do.

6. The terms of office of the Chairman and the members of GMAG expire on 29 February 1984. It would be highly desirable, in my view, to have the ACGM established immediately thereafter.

Though I understand that GMAG has it in mind to meet once more to deal with a back log of business which has accumulated while consultations on its future have been in progress, there are a



number of pressing new issues which a reconstituted committee will need to address, including for example the degree of containment appropriate to genetically manipulated oncogenes, a look at practice on "scale-up" and the industrial use of genetically manipulated organisms, and the degree of risk involved in spraying genetically manipulated organisms on crops. You may know that the latter question is causing much concern in the USA, and we must face it too.

7. With your leave, I propose to make a public announcement as soon as possible, probably by way of an inspired Parliamentary Question and Answer. That will leave the way clear for HSC to approach potential members and, in due course, to make appointments.

8. I am copying this minute, with attachments, to Jim Prior, George Younger, Nicholas Edwards, Patrick Jenkin, Norman Fowler, Norman Tebbit, Michael Jopling and Sir Robert Armstrong.

KJ.

13 December 1983

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND  
MEMBERSHIP OF THE NEW COMMITTEE

Terms of reference

- a. TO ADVISE THE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION AND HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE, IN CONNECTION WITH THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ETC ACT 1974, ON
  - i. the general standards of safe working to be observed by those undertaking activities relating to genetic manipulation;
  - ii. the categorisation of experiments;
  - iii. exemptions from the Health and Safety (Genetic Manipulation) Regulations 1978;
  - iv. the assessment of risks and precautions (and in particular of any new methods of physical or biological containment) and of any newly developed techniques for genetic manipulation;
  - v. at the request of HSE, the specific precautions necessary in individual cases of experimental work;
  - vi. at the request of HSE, the biological aspects of individual cases of the use of products of genetic manipulation;
  - vii. health monitoring and training of those undertaking genetic manipulation activities;
  - viii. the terms of any controls (regulations, codes of practice and guidance) to be applied generally to laboratories and other workplaces engaged in genetic manipulation or the use of products of genetic manipulation;
  - ix. such other matters as may be referred to the Committee by the HSC or HSE.



- b. TO ADVISE THE HEALTH, AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT, INDUSTRY AND NORTHERN IRELAND MINISTERS on such other matters relating to genetic manipulation as may be referred to the Committee by those Ministers and to offer comment on the technical or scientific aspects of any new developments in genetic manipulation which may have implications for their Departments.

Membership

The membership of the new committee would be as follows:

A chairman

5 employer representatives (3 nominated by the CBI, 1 by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and 1 by the Research Councils).

5 employee representatives (nominated by the TUC)

8 scientific and medical specialists.

Appointments would be made by the HSC. There would be consultation with Government Departments prior to the appointments of the Chairman and specialist members.

Representatives of interested Government Departments would attend meetings as observers.

10 3 DEC 1983

