

B

PRIME MINISTER

GENETIC MANIPULATION ADVISORY GROUP

Your Private Secretary wrote to mine on 20 December concerning my proposals to abolish the above Group and for the Health and Safety Commission to establish a new advisory committee in its place. I am sorry if my minute of 13 December did not make the case for the transfer clear.

The work of GMAG, which was originally almost wholly concerned with research and experimentation in genetic manipulation, has changed significantly since it was established in 1976. The questions it needs to address are now increasingly concerned with the industrial use of genetically manipulated organisms and with experimental work which is more directly industrially oriented than hitherto. The questions are, in short, questions related mainly to health and safety at work in laboratories, factories and industrial plants. It is inappropriate for Education and Science Ministers to remain (even indirectly) responsible for questions of this kind. They are matters which properly come within the province of the Health and Safety Commission. Indeed it is a fact that the main recipients of the bulk of the advice which has been given by GMAG in the past, and which will be needed in the future, are the HSC and the HSE, not myself.

The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) Medical Division and its Inspectors have worked very closely with GMAG for some considerable time now, and have steadily built up expertise in the area of the large-scale use of genetically manipulated organisms. What is needed now is an advisory committee which can work even more closely with HSE on these issues but which, at the same time, is accessible to other Ministers whose responsibilities touch upon aspects of genetic manipulation. For my part, my need for advice of this kind has been minimal and is now non-existent. Aside from the inappropriateness of an adhoc

committee which is wholly sponsored by this Department continuing to perform the functions described, GMAG as constituted simply would not be competent to offer advice on such things as the risks associated with industrial scale-up, a fact which GMAG itself readily acknowledges. It would not be in anyone's best interest, least of all the developing biotechnology industries, if we attempted to keep, as the locus for advice on health and safety in genetic manipulation work, a scientifically oriented advisory committee separate from the agency (HSE) responsible for enforcing Health and Safety at Work legislation.

There is unanimous agreement on the proposal among other interested Ministers and all the organisations which were consulted earlier this year, including the CBI and GMAG itself.

None of what is said above is intended to detract from the high reputation which GMAG has acquired during the 7 years it has been in existence, and to which your Private Secretary's letter alluded. There is absolutely no reason to suppose, however, that an advisory committee to the HSC, inheriting as it does the experience of GMAG plus a close relationship with the Health and Safety Executive, will not fulfil the new advisory role which we have outlined previously every bit as successfully as GMAG has fulfilled its allotted purpose. It is likely that the new Committee will include some of the existing GMAG members, though the balance of its membership overall will make it, appropriately enough, more industrially oriented than GMAG.

I hope that in the light of these further comments you can agree to the proposals in my minute of 13 December. I am copying this letter as before.

K.S.

10 January 1984

Social Services: GMA9

12/80

10 JAN 1984



PRIME MINISTER

Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group

Sir Keith Joseph sought your agreement before Christmas to the winding up of the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group, and the establishment in its place of an HSC Advisory Committee. You felt that his minute at Flag A failed to make out a convincing case for this change. Sir Keith has now written again (Flag B) to set out his thinking in more detail. His basic argument is that the work of GMAG has moved increasingly from the research field into the industrial sphere, where HSC are in a better position to offer advice. He thinks it likely that the new committee, if you agree that it should be established, will include some existing GMAG members, although the balance of its membership would be shifted in the direction of greater industrial expertise.

At Flag C is a note from Sir Robert Armstrong which supports Sir Keith's proposal, and seeks your agreement to an associated transfer of lead ministerial responsibility for genetic manipulation matters from the Secretary of State for Education and Science to the Secretary of State for Employment.

Agree:-

- i) that Sir Keith Joseph should announce the winding up of the GMAG and the establishment of an HSC Advisory Committee in its place? *Yes - although I limited because I do not hear well of the HSC.*
- ii) that lead ministerial responsibility should be transferred from DES to D/Emp and that this change should be announced at the same time as (i)? *Yes not*

Dubs

10 January 1984



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

Sir Keith's earlier minute failed to explain why it was thought necessary to wind-up the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group, and transfer its functions to an advisory Committee of the Health and Safety Commission.

Content, in the light of this further note, for the transfer to go ahead?

DWB
10/1



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 January 1984

MS
cc CO MIO
MAFF
DT +
DISS
DOE
WO
SO

Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's further minute of 10 January about his proposals to abolish the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Group and replace it with a new Advisory Committee to the Health and Safety Commission.

In the light of this further explanation, the Prime Minister agrees that your Secretary of State should announce the changes set out in his minute of 13 December.

I am sending copies of this letter to the recipients of the earlier correspondence.

David Barclay

J.F. Bird, Esq.,
Department of Education and Science.

h