

Letter from Malcolm Grant Chair, Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

September 2004

***GM Planting Regime* report - clarifications**

You will recall that we provided written evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs sub-committee's inquiry on the *GM Planting Regime* and that, as chair, I also gave oral evidence. However, I fear that in the Committee's report (eleventh report of session 2003-04, HC 607), the Commission has been misrepresented in a number of ways, and I write to draw your attention to this.

(1) In the introduction to the report, the AEBC is "described as a group of scientists" (paragraph 7) In fact, while several of our members are distinguished scientists, the Commission also includes members with expertise in philosophy, the biotechnology industry, agriculture, the law and with environmental NGOs. This is an important point, because it is this broad range of experience that allows the AEBC to fulfill its remit to look at the wider picture in offering strategic advice on biotechnology. The Government's purpose in setting up the AEBC was to bring together these disparate perspectives on an area of great public controversy.

(2) The Committee draws from the AEBC's report *GM Crops? Coexistence and Liability* (November 2003) in discussing adventitious thresholds of GM material. While it is acknowledged in paragraph 15 that our report "presents both sides of the argument", it is not made sufficiently clear in paragraph 19 that the quote used is followed immediately in our report by the opposing view. This quote may therefore give the impression that we recommended a 0.1% threshold for organic production, which we did not. In fact, we were unable to agree on this issue, but we did analyse the opposing arguments and we also recommended that work should be undertaken to ascertain what threshold levels would be achievable in practice.

(3) In discussing the AEBC's recommendation for an introductory period to monitor coexistence arrangements if GM crops were commercialised, you say "the Minister seemed receptive to the idea, although he said that it was a matter for the forthcoming consultation" (paragraph 29). While this is no doubt true, the fact is that the Government had already accepted our recommendation. The Government response to the GM dialogue, published on 9 March, says, "We agree with the AEBC's recommendation that there should be a carefully managed introductory period". This is reiterated in a letter to me of 28 April from Margaret Beckett, responding specifically to our coexistence and liability recommendations.

I hope that you will accept these important clarifications, and that you will publish them alongside the Government's response to your report, once received.

Malcolm Grant Chair, Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission