Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment

Annual report 2017

This report is published on behalf of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

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Foreword by the Chair, Professor Rosie Hails

This is the twenty-fourth annual report of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE). The report summarises the Committee's work as our advice, and other information about ACRE, can be found on the Gov.UK website at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/advisory-committee-on-releases-to-the-environment

ACRE is an advisory non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). The main role that ACRE fulfils is the provision of statutory advice to the UK Government and Devolved Administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. ACRE advises on the risks to human health and the environment from the release and marketing of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). ACRE also advises on the release of certain non-GM species that are proposed for use as bio-control agents, and which are not native to Great Britain.

During 2017, ACRE issued advice on ten GM products for commercial import and, or, processing, assessed two applications for GM trials for research purposes, advised on one application to release a non-native species as a bio-control agent, assessed two applications for GM medicinal products, and held two full committee meetings which were open to the public. Beth Purse was newly appointed to the committee in 2017, and Jim Dunwell was re-appointed.

I am keen that ACRE continues to be open and transparent, not only by continuing to hold our meetings in public, but also publishing its advice. We will continue to fulfil our statutory role going forward, issuing advice as required.

I would like to extend my thanks to the members of ACRE, the assessors and the secretariat for their efforts in supporting the work of the committee.

Rosie Hails

2018.

Main activities

Meetings

During 2017, ACRE held two regular committee meetings. As part of ACRE's commitment to openness and transparency these meetings were open to the public to attend as observers. Minutes of the meetings, and details of the next scheduled meeting are published at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/advisory-committee-on-releases-to-the-environment/about/our-governance

Casework

Applications for GM releases for research purposes

ACRE has assessed two applications to release GMOs for research purposes under Directive 2001/18 and the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 2002. The applications, ACRE's advice, and the outcome of the applications are available on the Gov.UK website as follows:

- Crop trial: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/genetically-modified-organisms-sainsbury-laboratory-17r2901
- Clinical trial: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/genetically-modified-organisms-university-of-southampton-17r5001

Food and feed marketing applications

ACRE also considered ten opinions issued by EFSA, the European Food Safety Authority, on notifications for placing GM cotton, maize, oilseed rape, and soybean. The applications were for import or processing, and not cultivation. In each of the cases considered, ACRE was satisfied that the genetically modified products posed no greater risk to human health or the environment than their conventional counterparts. Nearly all the marketing applications that ACRE assessed are processed through Regulation (EC) No. 1829/2003. The products assessed are detailed below:

- ACRE advice: applications to market GM soybeans and maize
- ACRE advice: applications to market GM cotton and rice
- ACRE advice: applications to market GM oilseed rape

Medicinal marketing applications

ACRE was also asked to advise on the environmental risk assessment aspects of marketing applications for two human gene therapy products containing, or consisting of, a GMO. These applications are submitted to the European Medicines Agency under Regulation (EC) No. 726/2004. Under this Regulation information on the assessment of the application is only made available as part of The European Public Assessment Report following the European Commission's decision at the end of the assessment process.

Other advisory duties

The Cabinet Office Public Bodies Reform team conducted a functional review of bodies that provide expert advice to government. The functional review looked across departments and examined the functions of over 100 expert committees advising government in similar or related areas. The approach allowed the Cabinet Office to identify the most effective ways of accessing and benefitting from expert advice and develop an optimal code of governance to preserve independence.

Governance and transparency

ACRE is a statutory advisory committee appointed under section 124 of the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) 1990 to provide advice to government regarding the release and marketing of genetically modified organisms. The Committee works within the legislative framework set out in Part VI of the EPA and the GMO Deliberate Release Regulations 2002 which, together, implement Directive 2001/18/EC.

Below are links to various sources of information relating to the work and membership of ACRE:

- Framework agreement
- Terms of reference
- Members' biographies and register of their interests