

## Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE)

# Minutes of the 160th ACRE meeting held on 20 February 2024

The meeting took a hybrid approach with attendees present and online. The morning session of the meeting was open to the public.

### **Attendees**

#### **ACRE members:**

Prof Jim Dunwell (Chair)

Dr Kathy Bamford

Prof Huw D Jones

Dr Huw E Jones

Prof Peter Lund

Prof Andrew Millar

Dr Ben Raymond

Dr Andy Wilcox

Prof Andrew Peters (co-opted expert)

#### **Assessors:**

Rachael Oakenfull (FSA)

Chris Stockdale (FSA)

Max Tollitt (FSA)

Rhys Williams (FSA)

Victoria Balch (FSA)

Bill MacDonald (Welsh Government)

Jayne Field (Natural England)

#### **Observers:**

Gerard Kerrins (GMI)

Iain Williams (GMI)

Laura Bowden (SASA)

Jessie O'Shaughnessy (SASA)

Luke Driscoll (Scottish Government)

Sue Grogan-Johnson (HSE)

## **Defra:**

Martin Cannell  
Mike Ellis  
Lucy Foster  
Richard Lloyd Mills  
Aroon Korgaonkar  
Sean Simpkins  
Janet Talling

### **1. Welcome, announcements, apologies, conflicts of interest**

The morning session of the meeting was open to members of the public to observe.

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming members, assessors, observers, officials, including 2 new non-scientific members of the Secretariat, and members of the public.

Apologies were received from the Northern Ireland Executive.

No conflicts of interest were declared.

### **2. Minutes and actions**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed by correspondence and have been published.

ACRE's advice on applications to market genetically modified food and feed were updated to reflect discussions at the previous meeting.

### **3. Updates from other committees**

The Chair invited members from the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) to update ACRE on matters of mutual interest.

The FSA gave an update on its consultation on regulating precision bred (PB) food and feed products. ACRE also received an update from the ACNFP's sub-group on Products of Genetic Technologies.

### **4. Appointments**

The ACRE Secretariat updated the Committee on a planned open campaign to recruit 3 new experts with expertise in veterinary medicine, molecular biology and environmental microbiology. This is subject to Ministerial approval.

## **5. The Genetic Improvement Network**

This item was for information for the Committee.

An official from Defra's Agri-food Science Team gave a presentation on the Defra funded crop genetic improvement network's crop breeding research and development platform. The platform enables the delivery of research and development and scientific knowledge to improve productivity, and help farmers and breeders produce more resilient and sustainable crops.

## **6. Revised live application for GM trial 23/R08/01 (camelina)**

In April 2023 ACRE assessed an application from Rothamsted Research to undertake a field research trial of *Camelina sativa* that has been engineered to produce omega-3 long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids, and other health-beneficial compounds in seeds.

ACRE requested additional information from the applicant. The additional information was received by Defra and passed to the Committee for consideration.

ACRE considered that the additional information addressed the issues it raised and will issue its advice accordingly.

## **7. Proposed termination of GM consent 17/R29/01 (potato)**

This item concerns the Sainsbury Laboratory's plan regarding disposal of the soil used during the GM trial of blight resistant potatoes when it terminates.

ACRE reviewed the risk management measures described by the Sainsbury Laboratory in relation to disposing the soil, and post-trial monitoring, deeming them appropriate. ACRE further considered that there were no risks additional to those considered in their original advice.

## **8. Variation request for GM consent 22/R55/01 (wheat)**

ACRE previously advised on Wild Bioscience's application to undertake a trial of GM wheat engineered for increased photosynthetic efficiency. Since gaining consent and starting the trial, the consent holder asked Defra to consider a proposed variation to it. Defra sought ACRE's advice on the proposed variation relating to the size of the trial and the scope of the exclusion zone.

ACRE discussed the environmental risk implications of the proposed variation and considered that the trial management measures recommended in its original advice remained appropriate. Updated ACRE advice will be published in due course.

## **9. Variation request for GM consent 21/R54/01 (barley)**

Defra has received a request to vary the conditions of a field trial consent held by Cambridge University Crop Science Centre for GM barley.

Defra sought ACRE's advice on the proposed variation. ACRE considered whether the new lines pose any additional potential risk to human health or the environment and the implications of overlapping GM consents and the inclusion of QHPs. The Committee will issue its advice in due course.

The open session of the meeting ended and the Committee broke for lunch.

## **10. Application for a vaccine trial 24/R56/01**

Defra received an application to undertake a clinical trial using a vaccine based on a genetically modified attenuated strain of Respiratory Syncytial Virus.

ACRE received the application from Defra prior to the meeting and requested further information via correspondence. The further information that ACRE requested from the applicant was presented at the meeting and included in ACRE's deliberations concerning the potential risks to human health and the environment resulting from the proposed trial. ACRE will issue its advice to enable Defra to make a decision in due course.

## **11. Updates from ACRE sub-groups**

The Genetic technology (Precision Breeding) Act establishes a regulatory framework for the marketing of PB plants and PB animals. ACRE was approached by Defra's Animal Health and Welfare team to assist in the development of a regulatory process for assessing animal health and welfare, and formed a sub-group dedicated to PB animals.

## **12. Next meeting**

The ACRE Secretariat will arrange the next meeting in due course.

## **13. AOB**

None