



EcoNexus



Brussels, 17 February 2010

To: Members of the STOA Panel

cc: Chairs and vice-chairs of the ENVI, AGRI, ITRE, EMPL, IMCO and TRAN
EU Parliament Committees

Dear Sir, Madam,

We would like to draw your attention, as a member of the Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA) panel, to our concerns regarding the seminar you are holding on 25 February 2010 on 'The impact of EU GMO regulation on biotechnology research for the public good'.

The seminar has been organised in cooperation with the Public Research Regulation Initiative (PRRI) and aims "to address the potential of and the constraints to public sector research in green biotechnology". This event is of concern to us as PRRI's credentials for acting in the public interest are seriously questionable.

PRRI is an industry-biased lobby group that claims to represent "public sector scientists who conduct research in modern biotechnology for the public good". PRRI primarily focuses on UN negotiations such as those under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

Specifically:

- Since its establishment in 2004, PRRI has received considerable funding from biotech corporations. PRRI funders include: CropLife International, the US Grain Council, Monsanto, Arborgen and several industry-based 'NGOs' including the Syngenta Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the International Service for the Acquisition of Agribiotech Applications (ISAAA), the Black Sea Biotechnology Association (BSBA) and the Donald Danforth Plant Science Centre (DDPSC).
- PRRI says it aims to counter the "misconception" that GM crops are "the exclusive domain of a handful of big, western multinationals". Yet, PRRI has opposed changes in the Aarhus Convention provisions which would give the public greater rights to participate in decision-making on GMOs.¹

¹ GM Watch, 13 March 2006, www.gmwatch.org/achive2/asp?arcid=6336

- PRRI is particularly concerned about establishing rules on liability and redress. It opposes mandatory insurance and funds based on the polluter pays principle.² It has also opposed the moratorium on the use of Terminator Technology (Genetic Use Restriction Technology or GURTs) at UN talks.
- PRRI objected to the chapter on genetic engineering in the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), proposing that the whole chapter be re-written.
- PRRI often organises activities jointly with the private sector. For example, the regional meetings held ahead of the 2008 CBD conference in Bonn were organised in collaboration with AfricaBio, the South African-based biotech industry organisation, and with the European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB) in Europe.
- Many PRRI members have strong direct links with the biotech industry. Its founder and honorary member Willy de Greef, a former Syngenta employee, is the Secretary General of EuropaBio, the lobby association for the biotech industry. PRRI chairman Marc Van Montagu founded the biotech companies Plant Genetic Systems Inc. and CropDesign and is president of the European Federation of Biotechnology (EFB). Leading members of the PRRI lobbying team at UN conventions include former Monsanto research director, Gerard Barry, and Piet van der Meer, who has been strongly criticised by UN delegates for his industry bias. PRRI member Roger Beachy is a founding president of the Monsanto funded Danforth Center and former co-chair of the scientific advisory board of the Akkadx Corporation. Numerous other examples can be found in the attached briefing.

The undersigned NGOs are seriously concerned about STOA's decision to organise a seminar on genetic engineering with such a strongly biased lobby group which, despite its claims, does not represent the public interest in modern biotechnology research.

We therefore urge STOA members to postpone the seminar in order to make sure that independent scientific experts as well as representatives from civil society are invited to debate the role of genetic engineering. It is essential, particularly for a group that aims to provide the European Parliament with "independent assessments of the various scientific or technological options", to ensure that balanced discussions take place on such a complex and contentious topic.

Yours sincerely,

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² PRRI Statement on liability and redress on the occasion of MOP4, 06 May 2008

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