

Scientific Chief Adviser of EU Commission under public pressure

Anne Glover advocates genetically engineered plants

31 July 2014 In a letter which was signed by Testbiotech, several NGOs are calling on the upcoming President of EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, not to nominate a chief scientific adviser again. The position of EU chief scientific adviser was created in 2011, and Anne Glover from Scotland was nominated. Since then Glover has several times spoken out publically in favour of genetically engineered plants for food production. Amongst other things she has claimed that eating GM food is no riskier than eating conventionally farmed food, because as yet there is no evidence that it is harmful.

Such statements are problematic not only because they are used by industry as proof of the safety of their products, but because they are in conflict with EU regulations for genetically engineered organisms. EU regulations require that the precautionary principle must apply where genetically engineered organisms are concerned, and risk assessment must be carried out even though there may not yet be any evidence of risk or hazard. The safety of genetically engineered plants cannot simply be presupposed. Recent research has thrown up new questions and new concerns. A Testbiotech report published in January 2014 cites several examples and includes a critical assessment of the role of Anne Glover. In 2012, the current president of the EU Commission, Manuel Barroso, said that her views do not necessarily represent the views of the Commission.

In the UK in particular, where the position of a scientific chief adviser has been established for several years, Anne Glover's position on this issue has found a great deal of resonance amongst her supporters. Some of them are suggesting that in future Glover should address a broader range of issues in addition to genetically engineered organisms.

The discussions regarding the EU chief scientific adviser are not only problematic in regard to the debate on transgenic organisms. The nomination of a chief scientific adviser may indeed arouse expectations that this highest scientific authority has the answer to all relevant questions if problematic political decisions have to be made. Such expectations would be impossible to fulfill. Science is permeated by pluralistic interests and opinions to same extent as general society. Anne Glover, who was involved in a start-up company and in filing a patent application in the field of biotechnology, is a good example in this context.

According to Testbiotech, the relationship between science and political decision making can only be organised as a dialogue, taking into account controversial positions from a broader range of stakeholders. Any institution or expert claiming consensus on the safety of genetically engineered plants on basis of current research cannot fulfill this requirement. In general, the idea of an expert installed in a position as the highest authority on scientific matters is not in accordance with the role of science in society. Therefore, Testbiotech strongly supports the demand to no longer nominate an EU scientific chief adviser.

Further information: [Letter of NGOs](#) [1]
[Testbiotech report: Free trade for 'high-risk biotech'?](#) [2]
[Webpage of scientific chief adviser](#) [3]
[Example of support for Glover](#) [4]

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Links

[1] <http://www.testbiotech.org/node/1087>

[2] <http://www.testbiotech.org/node/1007>

[3] http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/chief-scientific-adviser/index_en.htm

[4] <http://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2014/jul/24/science-advisers-coalition-environment-ngo-europe>