



Promoting the Science and Practice of Sustainable Crop Production

16 April 2012

Mark Wilson  
Defra  
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Dear Mr Wilson

### **BCPC Response to Defra Consultation on the future of ACP**

I am responding on behalf of BCPC to your email of 30 March 2012 regarding BCPC's view on the future of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

CRD clearly needs to access expertise that it does not have itself and so needs a standing advisory committee of experts - and perhaps an ability to widen representation on occasion depending on the decisions involved. The present arrangement, whereby the ACP is a statutory, advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) incorporates a number of safeguards which would not be present in the proposed expert scientific committee - i.e. ACP's terms of reference are defined by legislation and reports directly to ministers; these are very important factors in achieving (public) credibility in the Committee.

We understand the drive within Government to change to non-statutory expert scientific committees and that reform of the ACP has been guided by advice from the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, and an independent review. However, no details - such as the terms of reference or membership of any successor body - are given in the Consultation document on the proposed new Committee, apart from its non-Statutory status.

BCPC is prepared in principle to support the Government's preferred option C (to replace the ACP with an expert scientific committee). However, in the absence of information on the *modus operandi* of the proposed new expert scientific committee, **this support is conditional on answers to some key questions and assurance on a number of points.**

These are given below:

#### **Remit and Reporting**

- a. What will be the remit, who will the Committee report to, what will be the frequency of meetings, how will access be granted, how will agendas be formed, how will Minutes be displayed?
- b. Will the Committee peer review judgments on all submissions or simply respond to selected questions from CRD?
- c. Will it raise its own issues, and those voiced by the public?
- d. Will there be any process for guidance to or from the Minister(s) in relation to issues on the political agenda?

- e. Will decisions of the Committee be binding on CRD/Ministers or will it only have an 'advisory' role. There may be circumstances when science-based conclusions will not be politically acceptable. What will happen in such circumstances? In our view the Committee needs to have the power to make its own decisions irrespective of the political consequences.
- f. We do not agree that the remit should be broadened to include biocides. The required additional membership would result in a large group or reduce the number of relevant pesticide experts who could be convened in a timely fashion (see Frequency and Attendance, below).

**Membership**

- a. How will you ensure that members have no vested interest in the outcomes of decisions?
- b. Will there be sufficient members with 'real world' knowledge and experience of pesticides and their use – i.e. not just toxicologists? It is critical that such 'real world' experts are included in the membership.
- c. Will there be members affiliated to lobby groups or NGOs?
- d. Will membership be rotated on a regular albeit infrequent basis? (Note: This will prevent institutionalisation of the Committee - but could be a problem with some disciplines because of reduced funding affecting the availability of experts in some areas of science).
- e. Will the Committee have powers to take wider opinion from sources beyond its membership if it deems this necessary? It should have this power.

**Frequency and Attendance**

What will be the process for ensuring adequate frequency and attendance?  
(Note: in the past some authorisations have been held up for a critical few months because the right person(s) did not attend an ACP meeting).

**Approach**

It is critical to our support that the Committee will retain and foster a risk-based framework and approach.

**Budget**

Will the Committee have a budget for research funding to investigate issues, where answers are currently lacking, for example for the development of models (e.g. probabilistic risk models for application)?

We are happy to meet to discuss further, if this would help obtain satisfactory answers to these questions and to clarify the other points raised.

BCPC will be pleased for this submission to be published without reservation.

Yours faithfully

*Colin Ruscoe* (by e-mail)

Dr Colin Ruscoe

Chairman

BCPC