

To the President-designate of the European Commission, Mr Jean-Claude Juncker

by email

24th July 2014

Dear Mr Juncker

We write to you with some urgency in response to a letter you will have just received from nine NGOs urging you to abolish the position of Chief Scientific Advisor to the President of the European Commission. The letter, which includes Greenpeace as a signatory as well as other prominent NGO voices, alleges that the "post of Chief Scientific Adviser [sic] is fundamentally problematic" and asks you to "scrap this position"¹.

As organisations and individuals who share a commitment to improving the evidence available to policy makers, we cannot stress strongly enough our objection to any attempt to undermine the integrity and independence of scientific advice received at the highest level of the European Commission. The mandate of the Chief Scientific Advisor is to "provide independent expert advice on any aspect of science, technology and innovation as requested by the President"². We would reassert the fundamental value of this role, which is already minimally resourced for the task of improving the use of evidence in policymaking - a goal that attracts strong support across Europe. We would further defend the record of Professor Anne Glover in having delivered impartial and rigorous advice as she is mandated to do in this role. Some of us will be writing to you individually in more detail on these points and on the background to the recognised need for that role and others have written to you previously.

We note that the nine NGOs are opposing not just this position in general but specifically because they disagree with Professor Glover's advice on genetically modified crops and organisms. Professor Glover's advice can only be based on the conclusions of leading scientific bodies, which is - in the words of a recent European Commission report, that "GMOs are no more risky than conventional plant breeding technologies"³. This fundamental conclusion is reiterated by, among others, the scientific academies of Africa, Europe and elsewhere, the World Health Organisation and the American Association for the Advancement of Science⁴.

In polarised and divisive policy debates, as we have seen with climate change, it is all the more important that scientifically accurate and rigorous advice is given freely and without fear or favour. Policy makers or lobbyists who seek to remove scientists because they don't like their findings or advice do so at the peril of their citizens.

Finally, with respect to any organisations engaged in shaping policies in Brussels, we would hope that they would welcome rather than oppose independent evidence-based scrutiny of those policies.

For European citizens to have confidence in the way our institutions evaluate and develop policy, they need to be assured that there is access to independent scientific advice at the highest level and that this independence is not compromised.

Yours, on behalf of our organisations,

Professor Jos WM van der Meer, President, **European Academies' Science Advisory Council**

Professor Sierd Cloetingh, President, **Academia Europaea**

Professor Paul Hardaker, Chair, **Sense About Science**

Sir Richard Sykes, Chair, the **Royal Institution**

Professor James Wilsdon, Chair, **Campaign for Social Science**

Mr Hetan Shah, Executive Director, **Royal Statistical Society**

Professor Mark J Bailey, Director, **Centre for Ecology & Hydrology**

Professor Nigel Brown, President, **Society for General Microbiology**

Dr Mark Downs FSB, Chief Executive, **Society of Biology**

Ms Kate Baillie, Chief Executive, **Biochemical Society**

Professor David Webb, President-Elect, **British Pharmacological Society**

And these individuals also want to add their support

Professor Dr Klaus Ammann, Director Botanic Garden, University of Bern

Professor Peter Atkins FRSC

Professor Sir Walter Bodmer FRS FMedSci

Professor Alan R Boobis OBE PhD FSB CBIol FBTS, Imperial College London

Professor Ian Boyd, Chief Scientific Advisor, Defra, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, UK

Professor Ian Brown OBE FRCP FFOM, University of Oxford

Professor Jonathan Butterworth, University College London

Professor Alan Bundy, University of Edinburgh

Professor David Coggon FMedSci, University of Southampton

Professor Brian Cox OBE, University of Manchester

Professor John Davison, Research Director, INRA French National Agricultural Research Agency

Professor Anthony D Dayan DM FRCP FRCPATH FFPM FFOM

Professor Rob Edwards, Head of School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
Newcastle University

Dr Torbjörn Fagerström, Swedish Foundation for Strategic Research and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Dr Marc Fellous, Emerit Université Denis Diderot

Diana Garnham, Chief Executive, Science Council

Professor Azra Ghani, Imperial College London

Professor Peter Green FRS, University of Bristol

Professor David Hand, Imperial College London

Professor Sir Brian Heap, Chief Scientific Advisor, Cambridge Malaysian Education and Development Trust

Professor Christopher F Higgins FRSE FRSA FMedSci, Vice-Chancellor and Warden, Durham University

Professor Steve Jones FRS, University College London

Professor Lord (John) Krebs Kt FRS FMedSci

Dr Marcel Kuntz, Director of Research, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

Professor Sir Peter Lachmann, University of Cambridge

Professor Chris Leaver CBE FRS FRSE, Oxford

Dr Robin Lovell-Badge FRS, Head of the Division of Stem Cell Biology and Developmental Genetics, MRC National Institute for Medical Research

Mark Lynas, Visiting Fellow, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University

Professor Julian Ma, Hotung Chair of Molecular Immunology, St George's University of London

Dr John Marsden, King's College London

Professor John McWhirter FRS FREng FLSW, Cardiff University

Professor Piero Morandini, University of Milan

Professor Neville Moray, University of Surrey

Professor Richard Morris FRS, University of Edinburgh

Professor Vivian Moses, King's College London

Professor David J Nutt MRCP MRCPsych FRCPsych FMedSci

Professor Chris Pollock CBE, Aberystwyth University

Professor Guy Poppy, Chief Scientific Advisor, Food Standards Agency

Lord (Martin) Rees, President of Royal Society 2005-10

Professor Filippo Rossi, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

Professor John Shepherd FRS, University of Southampton

Professor Trevor Stuart FIC FRS, Imperial College London

Hazel Thornton, Independent Citizen Advocate for Quality in Science and Healthcare
Professor Anthony Trewavas FRS FRSE, Institute of Molecular Plant Science
Professor Robin A Weiss FRS FMedSci, University College London

Address for correspondence: Síle Lane, Sense About Science,
slane@senseaboutscience.org

¹ <http://corporateeurope.org/power-lobbies/2014/07/position-chief-scientific-advisor-president-european-commission>

² http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/chief-scientific-adviser/index_en.htm

³ ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/kbbe/docs/a-decade-of-eu-funded-gmo-research_en.pdf

⁴ See <http://www.geneticliteracyproject.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/climateGMOconsensus.pdf> for a list and a comparison with consensus positions on climate change.