

PRESS RELEASE (Embargoed until Weds 2nd June 2010)

Resignation of Professor Brian Wynne from the Steering Group of the Food Standards Agency's public dialogue 'Food: the use of GM'

Professor Brian Wynne of Lancaster University has resigned from the Steering Group of the Food Standards Agency's public dialogue 'Food: the use of GM'.

In his resignation letter, released today, Professor Wynne cites a series of concerns about the public dialogue, including:

- Serious criticisms about the role of the Food Standards Agency and the attitude of its Chair, former agriculture minister Lord Rooker, who *inter alia* at a meeting with the Steering Group on May 27th called the public "anti-science";
- Rejection of the Food Standards Agency's claim to be neutral on the GM crops issue, when its own premises lead to an effective pro-GM stance even before it decides explicit policy;
- The obsessive focus on genetic modification (GM), to the exclusion of alternative approaches to global food security and sovereignty issues, and the portrayal of such issues as purely about science;
- The lack of accountability of the dialogue to ministers, and lack of clarity about its relationship to relevant policy processes and decisions;
- Lack of confidence that in this context potential contractors will be able to conduct an open and fair dialogue which is able to listen to public issues and questions on global food and agriculture, thus concern that the process will generate public mistrust;
- A false assumption entrenched in the policy institutional culture that any public or other stakeholder question which may be expressed, has an expert answer, and the ensuing shallowness of policy interpretation and understanding of the public's issues;
- That although the initiative has been presented as a public dialogue, *de-facto* it has been an *extractive* exercise, eliciting public attitudes and (under the above false terms) questions, but not accountably responding to them;
- Failure of the dialogue to meet the government's own *Sciencewise* standards.

Professor Wynne said:

"Despite the best efforts of Steering Group members, this public dialogue is more likely to increase public alienation and mistrust than to increase public confidence about policy decision-making in the area of food and agriculture."

"FSA appears not to understand the socio-political as well as scientific fabric of such issues, and is thus unable to recognise its own social and political biases and confusions when doing what it calls public dialogue, and yet misrepresenting itself as following only 'sound science'".

Brian Wynne was Vice Chair of the Steering Group and is a leading expert on public understanding of science, focusing on the relations between scientific expert and public knowledge, and policy-making involving science. He is Professor of Science Studies at Lancaster University, and Associate Director of the ESRC Centre for Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics (Cesagen). He was Special Advisor to the House of Lords Science and

Technology Select Committee's inquiry into Science and Society in 2000, and in 2007 he chaired an EU expert group report on *Science and Governance: Taking European Knowledge Society Seriously*.