

Royal Society submission to the House of Commons Select Committee on Environment Food and Rural Affairs call for views on Defra's scientific infrastructure

The Royal Society welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the initial stages of the inquiry into Defra's scientific infrastructure. This submission has been prepared from previous policy work, listed below. We welcome the opportunity to engage with the Committee as it develops this inquiry further.

Issues to investigate

We think that the suggestions made by the Committee of areas to investigate are sensible. Within these, we make the following suggestions for specific areas to consider:

- Whether the Defra family of agencies and NDPB's is adequately used, including the level of understanding within Defra of the different roles and responsibilities of the individual organisations.
- Whether the quality-assurance mechanisms that Defra has in place for the science undertaken by its executive agencies are effective.
- Whether Defra's financial support for its own research institutes, and research within Research Council Institutes, enables them to make long-term strategic decisions and maintain capacity for research expertise.
- How non-specialist perceptions of scientific issues are included in the policy-making process.
- Whether demand for basic science as well as innovation and other technological development is stimulated by appropriate policy drivers.

Suggested approach

We suggest that the Committee considers the use of case-studies to look at these issues, and does not try to examine every area within Defra's remit. We believe this will be more effective in identifying areas for commendation or concern, rather than generalised statements of principle. Good examples of case-study subjects include:

- Infectious diseases in livestock
- Antimicrobial resistance
- Genetically modified crops
- Biodiversity
- Fisheries and marine environment management
- Avian influenza

Policy statements

Royal Society (2002) Royal Society Inquiry commissioned by the UK Government into Infectious Diseases in Livestock

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=1392>

Royal Society (2006) Response to Defra Evidence and Innovation strategy 2005-08 consultation

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=4242>

Royal Society (2005) Royal Society response to OST's consultation on the use of science by Defra

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=3211>

The long term management of radioactive waste: the work of the Committee on Radioactive Waste (CoRWM)

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=4015>

Royal Society (2006) Pandemic influenza: science to policy

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=5574>

Royal Society (2006) Royal Society submission to the UK Marine Bill consultation

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=4912>

Royal Society (2006) Response to Defra's consultation on controlling the spread of bovine tuberculosis on cattle: badger culling

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=4290>

Royal society (2006) NERC consultation on the future of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=4173>

Royal Society (2007) Response to Defra's consultation on the coexistence of GM, conventional and organic crops

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=5753>

Royal Society (2007) Biodiversity – Climate Interactions: Report of a meeting held at the Royal Society

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=6830>

Royal Society (2007) Responses to the draft climate change bill

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=6911>

Royal Society (2008) Sustainable biofuels: prospects and challenges

<http://royalsociety.org/document.asp?id=7366>

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