



A l'attention de

Madame Laurette Onkelinx
Ministre de la Santé publique
Rue du Commerce 78-80
1040 Bruxelles

et de
Monsieur Paul Magnette
Ministre du Climat et de l'énergie
Rue Bréderode 9
1000 Bruxelles

date : 11/07/2008
vos réf. : PM/HP/A4/FC/VF/02314
nos réf. : BAC_2008_790
annexe(s) : -

REGISTERED MAIL

Concerns: Dossier B/BE/07/V2 (genetically modified poplars) – Advice of the Biosafety Advisory Council concerning the protocol proposed by the notifier for the environmental evaluation of the field trial with GM grey poplar

Madam and Mister Minister,

The Biosafety Advisory Council acknowledges the receipt of your letter of 1 July 2008 (ref. PM/HP/A4/FC/VF/02314) asking the advice of the Council concerning the protocol proposed by the notifier for the environmental evaluation of the field trial with GM grey poplar.

1. Background

The notifier has asked permission to install a field trial with transgenic grey poplar. The plants are very difficult to propagate vegetatively, they are all females (hence they do not produce pollen), and they will be cultivated in a short rotation coppice system in which they will not be allowed to flower (hence they will not produce seeds) since stems will be cut down after a period of growth of three years (or earlier). The trial will be organised in quasi confined conditions.

2. Procedure

Owing to the end of the academic year and the beginning of the summer vacation and the short delay in which an advice is asked for, the Biosafety Advisory Council was not been able to organise a physical meeting, nor was it able to ask advice of its experts.

Hence the members of the the Biosafety Advisory Council were asked to comment on the protocol by email. The protocol was available to the members on 2 July 2008 and they were asked to comment before 10 July 2008, in order to prepare an advice before 15 July 2008.

3. Results

a) The members that supported the original positive advice for the cultivation of a field trial with GM grey poplar either did not react or did confirm that the protocol is a valuable annex to the original dossier. This protocol will improve scientific knowledge concerning the growth pattern and morphology of the transgenic trees and concerning the susceptibility to pests and diseases and to abiotic stress in the trial site.

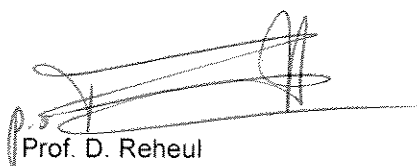
In addition, the protocol announces to study the diversity of soil bacteria and fungi in a trial site in France where different transgenic poplar clones are tested.

b) Two members expressed their concerns on the procedure to construct this advice and on the potential shortcomings of the protocol and the initial trial.

One member is of the opinion that it is not a sound procedure to give advice in such a short period of time without the support of the opinion of experts. In particular he wonders if and how a changed susceptibility to biotic stresses of the transgenic trees might create an additional pressure on neighbouring non transgenic trees.

The second expert also expresses his reserves towards the followed procedure to give this advice. He admits that the protocol will improve our knowledge, but as well as his colleague member he fears that it will be impossible to keep the transgenic poplars on a leash once transgenic poplars are cultivated on a large scale and that in the long run sexual or asexual intermingling and hence invasiveness with non transgenic poplars might be inevitable.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. D. Reheul
President of the Biosafety Advisory Council

Dr. Ph. HERMAN

cc. : Members of the Biosafety Advisory Council