

The response reproduced below was submitted further to an invitation to comment on the draft Discussion Paper by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics: *The use of genetically modified crops in developing countries*, during June to August 2003. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Professor Alan Ryan: Chair, former Nuffield Council on Bioethics Working Party on GM crops, UK

I don't have anything to contribute, I think. I always thought the strong point of our report was Michael's contribution - can someone congratulate him on his CMG for me? - on the potential for developing countries, and I always thought that what got overlooked was our line on the very marginal issues GM crops posed for developed and over-fed countries, as well as our insistence on the need for publicly funded long-range research. I am also cheered to see that the precautionary principle is handled with the right sort of scepticism, and the general habit of ignoring the fact that doing nothing is not risk-free is properly rebuked.

So, my general feeling is that it's nice to see that our four years ago thoughts have held up well. I do, however, have a lingering feeling that the Council on Bioethics ought to publish a short paper - twenty pages - written by some combination of journalists, politicians, and civil servants as well as the usual suspects on the larger puzzle of how to get a rational public debate on any of these issues going - not just GM but xenotransplantation, pre-emptive incarceration of the potentially dangerous insane, genetic screening - just about everything in the Council's remit. I do think that the Malcolm Grant committee has been a disaster, and fear it'll put the government off trying anything of the sort ever again. But we ought to be able to borrow the US experience with citizens' juries and do something sensible with it.

But as the paper, I think it's spot on.