



## **Power, dissent, equality: understanding contemporary politics**

### *Conclusions*

#### **Voice Over**

The final reports from both the Science Review Panel and GM Nation sent a powerful message that Britain wasn't yet ready for widespread commercial planting. Nevertheless, the British Government continued to license experimental planting of GM crops and the public debate continued. Today, looking back at the events of 2003, the participants in the debate have complex mixed feelings.

#### **Dr. Andrew Stirling, GM Science Review Panel Member**

It was genuinely a new and quite radical idea that you actually link in an examination of science with public concerns, that you really explicitly attend to what the uncertainties and the gaps in knowledge are, that you try to go beyond just collecting together a bunch of disciplines and actually look at different viewpoints as well within the disciplines, that you attend to divergent views at the end so you don't just necessarily crunch out a single answer but explore the implications of different views, and finally that you actually interact with stakeholders and find out what they've got to say about what you're concluding, and have a little bit of a dialogue with those critical stakeholders. All those things were attempted to varying degrees, with varying degrees of success in the Science Review, and I felt that was really quite positive and contains a lot of models for practice elsewhere.

#### **Prof Howard Dalton, DEFRA Chief Scientific adviser, Joint Chair Science Review Panel**

When it was all set up the individual panels, the three panels that we had: the GM Nation, the Science Review, and the Economic Review, all did a terrifically good job in my view of trying to get to grips with the questions, and we all were addressing the same core questions posed originally, all looked at it from that perspective. There was interactions early on and there was cross-membership of panels between the different review panels, but I don't think it was in a sense managed as well as it ought to be from a major perspective, I think we could have actually learnt a bit more and done a bit more in terms of cross-fertilisation.

#### **Lord Melchett, Former chair, Greenpeace**

This was about technology and not science. The Government were resting on the wrong thing, and anyhow the thing they were resting on got shakier and shakier as time went by. It's a great thing about science and when we generally make some huge discovery and then discover simply that that's told us how much more we have to discover, but people in politics who rest on science don't see all of that uncertainty and unknowns, and new knowledge to discover, there were some scientists told me this is a good idea, better do it. It's an ignorance of science not a support of science.

#### **Michael Meacher, MP, Minister of state for the Environment & Agro-development 1997-2003**

The whole exercise was actually done properly. It wasn't done in a slovenly way, it wasn't done in a way which pre-determined the results, the problem was it was done, I think, at the highest level rather cynically in terms of well we're going through this exercise but we're the ones who take the decision in the end, and although we'll never say this publicly we've already made up our mind. That was the problem.