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From the Minister of State for Climate Change & Environment
Elliot Morley MP

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your letter of 9 March regarding Early Day Motion 1300 on 'Terminator seeds'.

There has been no change on our position 'Terminator seeds'. The Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) decided, in 2000, that there should be a precautionary approach in field testing and commercial development of Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTs) while research into the possible socio-economic impacts of these technologies was carried out. 'Terminator seeds' are one example of plants bred using these technologies. As noted in the Early Day Motion, Governments at the upcoming CBD meeting in March will consider, among other things, a progress report by the Convention's scientific sub-group before considering whether a further decision on this matter is appropriate. It is likely however the UK position will be to reaffirm its 2000 decision.

Our position at the meeting will take full account of information provided in relevant reports, as well as the EU's own regulatory regime which requires that no GM seed may be marketed in the EU unless it has been specifically approved by the Member States. As a general principle decisions on applications to market Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are made on a case-by-case basis taking full account of a scientific assessment of the particular GMO and the risks associated with its use against the criteria in the EU legislation.

Recognising that there are both potential benefits and risks associated with GM crops, all countries should be able to make their own informed choices about whether to adopt GM technologies. This is of particular importance for some developing countries where farmers tend to rely more heavily on seeds replanted from the previous season's harvest.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, under the CBD, has been developed to ensure that all countries, which are signatories to the Protocol, are able to make their own decisions about whether to authorise a GMO for import. The Protocol has a strong precautionary approach. This means that importing countries are able to take a decision to avoid or minimise potential adverse effects of GMOs even if there is a lack of scientific certainty on the extent of such potential adverse effects. The Protocol allows for socio-economic considerations to be taken into account in individual parties' decision making process and encourages all Parties to share information on such potential impacts in addition to information on scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on GMOs.

These measures will help both developing and developed countries to make informed decisions on the import and export of GM organisms and help to ensure that developing countries are not disadvantaged by the development of GM technologies. More information on the Cartagena Protocol can be found at www.biodiv.org/biosafety. We are not aware of any commercial application to market Genetic Use Restriction Technologies.

*Yours
Elliot*

ELLIOT MORLEY