



PRESS RELEASE

7 March 2007

BATTLE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HIGH GROUND IN SCIENCE DEBATES

In a world of GM crops, global warming and arguments over whether organic food is healthier than conventionally grown crops, science is regarded by some as being able to provide the answers, but others would say it is actually creating some of the problems. Academics and environmentalists will cross swords in a debate on the controversial topic: “The environment would be fine if only scientists were in charge” in front of an audience of policy makers, civil servants and students and the general public on Friday 9 March.

The debate is the first in a series organised by the UK Research Councils’ Rural Economy and Land Use Programme to mark the ESRC’s Festival of Social Science and National Science and Engineering week, under the title “Power and Responsibility: Who decides? You decide!”

Bill Sutherland, the Miriam Rothschild Professor of Conservation Biology at Cambridge University, and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds’ Director

of Conservation Policy, Mark Avery, will suggest that there should be more government intervention based on science to conserve natural habitats.

On the opposing side will be Susan Owens, Professor of Environment and Policy, Cambridge University and Andy Stirling, Professorial Fellow at the University of Sussex Science Policy Research Unit, and a former Greenpeace activist, who will argue that more complex moral and ethical debate, and more public involvement, is what we need to address environmental issues.

Mark Avery of the RSPB said: "We live in an ecological world – so let's give scientists a chance. The alternative is to let lawyers, economists and politicians continue to trash our world."

But Andy Stirling, from Sussex University's Science Policy Research Unit said: "In a democracy, we do not put economists exclusively in charge of the economy, doctors in charge of health policy or judges in charge of making, as well as interpreting, the law. So we should be very careful about putting scientists exclusively in charge of the environment. Experts are essential, but should be 'on tap, not on top'."

Other debates in the series are:

- "Consumers cannot be left to themselves to decide what to eat" on Monday 12 March with Gareth Edwards-Jones, Professor of Agriculture and Land Use Studies at the University of Wales, Bangor; Dr Michelle Harrison, Director of the Henley Centre; Bruce Traill, Professor of Food

Economics at Reading University and Dr Tom MacMillan, Executive Director of the Food Ethics Council.

- “Farmers should be responsible for controlling livestock diseases” on Wednesday 14 March with Professor Jeff Waage, from the Centre for Environmental Policy at Imperial College; Sean Rickard, Senior Lecturer in Business Economics at Cranfield University; Michael Winter, Professor of Rural Policy and Director of the Centre for Rural Research at Exeter University and John Lloyd Jones, Chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales.

For further information contact:

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Notes for Editors:

- 1 The debate will take place at 6 pm on Friday 9 March at the Royal Academy of Engineering, 29 Great Peter Street, London and members of the press are invited to attend. To attend please contact ESRC Conference Desk tel 020 8542 8223 or esrc@vistaevents.co.uk
- 2 The Rural Economy and Land Use Programme is a UK-wide research programme carrying out interdisciplinary research on the multiple challenges facing rural areas. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Biotechnical and Biological Sciences Research Council and the Natural Environmental Research Council, with additional funding from the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- 3 The Festival of Social Science is organised by the Economic and Social Research Council, and runs from March 9th to 18th, alongside National Science and Engineering Week. It celebrates some of the very best British social science research, as well as highlighting the ways in which social science makes a difference to everyday lives. Press releases detailing some of the varied events are available at www.esrcfestival.ac.uk or for more information please contact the ESRC Press Office on 01793 413032 or via e-mail: alexandra.saxon@esrc.ac.uk

- 4 National Science and Engineering Week (formerly National Science Week) is an opportunity for people of all ages to take part in science, engineering and technology activities. National Science and Engineering Week is coordinated by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, funded by the Department of Trade & Industry and working in partnership with the Engineering and Technology Board. See <http://www.the-ba.net/the-ba/Events/NSEW/>

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