

Public Research & Regulation

Foundation with the objective to involve the public research sector in regulations and international agreements relevant to modern biotechnology

Friends of the Earth Europe
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Dear Sir/Madam,

I refer to the FOEE press release of 30 May 2006, titled "Friends of the Earth demands sacking of industry scientists in EFSA shake up".

In that press release FOEE describes the Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI) as 'an industry-funded pressure group that campaigns for weaker biosafety legislation and campaigns against public access to information'.

Your press release contains several incorrect assumptions regarding the PRRI, as well as some more general misperceptions.

With regard to the incorrect assumptions about PRRI:

- PRRI is not a pressure group that campaigns for weaker biosafety legislation.

As you can read on our web site and in our public statements, PRRI is a world wide initiative that offers public researchers a forum through which they can participate in international negotiations that are relevant for modern biotechnology, such as Meetings of the Parties of the Biosafety Protocol. Members of PRRI are researchers who are working day-to-day on solutions for some of the major challenges that the world community faces such as poverty, malnutrition, poor human health and environmental degradation in developing countries. As with any new technological development, it makes perfect sense to make a risk/benefit analysis related to this research. Consequently, as you can read on our web site and in our public statements, PRRI supports adequate biosafety legislation that allows Governments to make informed decisions. In fact, PRRI has elaborated a detailed Guide for notifications and risk assessment of releases of GMOs. PRRI supports a responsible use of the Precautionary Approach, but opposes its abuse in order to stop important research and development. We do not serve future generations by simply putting bans on possible avenues of research and development if there are no clear indications that those developments will pose risks that outweigh the benefits.

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- PRRI is not an industry funded group.

The bulk of the work of PRRI is volunteer work by its members. However, budget is needed to cover costs such as the participation in international meetings. As you can read on our web site and in our public statements, PRRI has received financial support from governments, national and international organisations and the private sector. On our web site you can find who our donors are, what our annual budgets are and the activities we have been able to carry out with those budgets.

- PRRI is not a pressure group that campaigns against public access to information.

As you can read on our web site and in our public statements, PRRI regards public awareness and public participation as very important mechanisms to ensure that the public is provided with a balanced view of both the potential benefits and the potential risks of the development and use of LMOs. In fact, we believe that there is an urgent need for an extra effort in public awareness, because there are a number of persistent misconceptions in the public debate about modern biotechnology and the risks involved of applying LMOs.

In summary, every element of the assumption that PRRI is 'an industry-funded pressure group that campaigns for weaker biosafety legislation and campaigns against public access to information', is incorrect. What is particularly disconcerting about this is that the authors of the statement have not taken the trouble to look on our web site or to contact us. This is, apart from unprofessional, not helpful in a public debate that already suffers from misperceptions and misinformation.

I therefore kindly ask you to correct this in a FOEE press release and on your web site.

In case you have any queries about this or about PRRI in general, I invite you for a meeting.

Yours sincerely,



Em. Prof. Marc van Montagu

Chairman of the Steering Committee of the
Public Research and Regulation Initiative