



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

DOCUMENT ON BIOTECHNOLOGY SAFETY

(28th May 1991)

abstract

The opinion offers a contribution to the debate on the safety of innovative biotechnologies and genetic engineering, focusing the attention on the risks deriving from the deliberate introduction of genetically modified organisms into the environment. The Committee recognises a broad meaning of the concept of 'safety', understood as the primary expression of an ethic of individual and collective responsibility.

The need for legislation on biotechnology safety, in the direction indicated by a number of European and international bodies and organisms, is clearly stated. Furthermore greater scientific commitment is necessary in the future for the improvement of the evaluation of the risks associated with the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms into the environment.

The Committee recognises the role of public opinion in the acceptance of biotechnologies and considers that the involvement of society in the management and definition of risk is important, by means of proper information on biotechnologies and with the adoption of transparent decisions. Absolute priority should however be given to the experimentation of biotechnological innovations that are useful to society.

Uniformity of criteria must be followed for the evaluation of the risk and the definition of control measures on biotechnology innovation experimentation, so as to prevent western companies and research centres from testing innovations considered too risky at home in developing countries. The Italian legislator is invited to take action in order to suppress this phenomenon.

Lastly, the document considers it opportune to establish an authority that would censor and authorise the subjects carrying out research and experiments in biotechnologies, promoting the right information on these issues and giving support and technical-scientific updates to those working in the sector.

The opinion is accompanied by a technical-scientific report on the evaluation of the risks deriving from the use and experimentation of biotechnologies and by an acknowledgement of the national and international regulations on the subject.