



IRC in Nanotechnology
University of Cambridge

Nano Jury puts technology under the microscope

Citizens' jury to debate nanotechnologies

Embargoed 00.01 Thursday 19 May

An unprecedented partnership is to seek out informed public views on nanotechnology, giving the public the opportunity to become part of the debate as to how this emerging and potentially revolutionary technology should develop.

A five-week long citizens' jury on nanotechnologies, Nano Jury UK, will begin in Halifax, Yorkshire on 25th May, sponsored by the IRC in Nanotechnology University of Cambridge [1], Greenpeace UK, the Guardian and the Policy, Ethics and Life Sciences Research Centre of the University of Newcastle.

A citizens' jury is like a legal jury in that they will give a 'verdict' after being presented with information and perspectives from a range of different witnesses, then discussing the evidence amongst themselves. The witnesses will be chosen by the Oversight Panel and the Science Advisory Panel. Jurors will hear evidence about the potential applications, opportunities, challenges and risks of nanotechnologies from a range of academic and civil society experts [2]. The jury's findings will then feed into the Government's Nanotechnology Co-ordination Group, which will respond to them in the wider context of other activities.

Nanotechnologies are predicted to generate sales of \$1 trillion by 2015, and could affect every sphere of our lives including healthcare, computers, consumer gadgets, energy, defence and food. In fact anything which uses materials will potentially be affected by the technology and countries around the world are racing to get an early advantage. However the priorities and emphasis of the uses to which nanotechnologies may be put has been little discussed in the public domain. These are highly political questions, but ones from which elected national governments and political parties have traditionally kept away.

Political and public conflict over technological developments like genetically modified organisms (GMO) has highlighted how different sectors of society can take radically different views over the direction and consequences of development of science and technology. Recent reports from House of Lords and Royal Society/Royal Academy of Engineering have emphasised the importance of involving the public in a two-way dialogue about emerging technologies. Nano Jury UK is an attempt to do just that, at an early stage in its development.

Doug Parr from Greenpeace said:

"So many questions about GM technology went unasked in the early stages. We want to provide an opportunity for people to give their perspectives on nanotechnology at a time when we hope they can still make a difference. We may be able to harness nanotechnology for environmental and social good, not harm, but it will depend on decisions now."

Mark Welland from the University of Cambridge Nanoscience Centre said:

"We aim to promote transparency and ensure that our world-beating science is carried out in an environment where the broader societal issues surrounding technology exploitation are fully explored and so that public understanding with respect to complex scientific issues is based on fact and accurate information."

Simon Rogers, editor of the Guardian's Life science section, said:

"We want to help democratise the process – there's no reason for nanotechnology to become another GM. By debating the issues now, we will all be much better informed when the time comes to make big decisions. We will be following the progress of the jury closely and providing a forum for interested readers, both in the newspaper and online at www.guardian.co.uk/life/nanojury"

Tom Wakeford from PEALS said:

"Our team of facilitators aim to ensure that the jury will act as a means for UK citizens to exerting their democratic right to a say in the development of this major area of government policy."

ENDS

For more information contact Greenpeace press office on 020 7865 8255

Interviews can be arranged with:

- Dr. Doug Parr, Greenpeace, on 18th and 19th of May, contact via Greenpeace press office or 020 7 865 8240
- Prof. Mark Welland on 19th May. Robert Doubleday, 18th May, from Cambridge University Nanoscience Centre. Contact via Corina in Cambridge University Press Office 01223 765542
- Simon Rodgers, Guardian, 020 7 713 4942
- Members of the jury. Contact via Tom Wakeford 079661 70713, or Bano Murtuja, on 01254 290244

Notes:

[1] Interdisciplinary Research Centre in Nanotechnology at the University of Cambridge

[2] The Oversight Panel for the Nano Jury UK process:

Rebecca Willis, Green Alliance (chair)

Mark Welland/Robert Doubleday, Cambridge University Nanoscience Centre

Doug Parr, Greenpeace

Tom Wakeford, PEALS, University of Newcastle

Simon Rogers, The Guardian

Adrian Butt, Department of Trade and Industry/Office of Science and Technology

Monica Winstanley, BBSRC

Richard Jones, University of Sheffield

Nick Pidgeon/Tee Rodgers-Hayden, University of East Anglia

Jim Thomas, ETC Group
Paul Atherton, Nanoventures
Hugh Robertson/Paul Nowak, TUC

The Science Advisory Panel is:

Richard Jones, University of Sheffield
Saul Tendler, University of Nottingham
Tim Jones, Imperial College
Kevin Matthews, Oxonica
Ken Donaldson, University of Edinburgh
Andy Stirling, University of Sussex
Simon Baumberg, University of Leeds