

Anne Glover, Europe's chief science adviser faces anti-GMO, anti-tech politics

Anne Glover is European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso's chief scientific advisor. She was hired in 2011 to help give counsel on important scientific issues to policy makers, counsel that in theory helps EU members to make educated scientific decisions outside of the prism of politics. On May 21, Glover spoke out about her role, and how the structure of research provided to policymakers is deeply flawed, [Euractiv reports](#):

Describing her role at the Commission, Glover said she enjoyed considerable freedom in providing scientific advice to Barroso. Although her opinions remain confidential, she has made widely-publicised comments on subjects as diverse – and controversial – as climate change, GMOs or shale gas.

But it appears she also found it difficult to disentangle the Commission's evidence gathering processes from what she calls the “political imperative” that's behind them.

Policy makers are often first made aware of scientific issues by advocates, who engage with the issue from a particular point of view. They then direct their staff to look into the evidence, but from an initially biased position, thereby ensuring the research result is biased from by the distorted claim of evidence in the first place.

Glover said this distortion affect is keeping her and the men and women she advises from engaging with science important policy issues:

There are countless examples of topics where EU policymakers have bickered over the evidence, including on the [safety of nanoparticles](#), the [impact of biofuel crops](#) over food prices or [chemical substances with hormone-disrupting effects](#).

The EU has also faced strong political interference causing it to strictly regulate genetically modified crops, even though they are safe, [Roxanne Palmer reported at International Business Times](#):

The [political establishment in the] European Union is unique in the world for its strong stance against genetically modified organisms, primarily based upon [political] concerns over potential health risks and environmental contamination. But many scientists say the opposition to GM crops is based more on fear than evidence; one recent attention-grabbing paper from French researchers linking GM corn to tumors [was retracted] as scientifically flawed.

Glover has [spoken out against this over-regulation of GMOs to Euractiv](#) and its impact on distorting safety facts for the public:

“There is no evidence that GM technologies are any riskier than conventional breeding technologies and this has been confirmed by thousands of research projects,” Glover said. “In my view consumers can believe in the overwhelming amount of evidence demonstrating that GM technology is not any riskier than conventional plant breeding technology.

In order to preserve scientific independence, Glover will urge the next European Commission to restructure their scientific research efforts when it comes to sensitive policy issues.

“What I am going to propose for the next President of the European Commission is to try and develop a new system of evidence gathering within the Commission that entirely disconnects evidence gathering with the political imperative,” Glover said... “A central service which would be the evidence portal,” she says.

The research service would disseminate the unbiased information to the Commission members to help guide policy decisions. Glover, however, does not assume that better evidence will still lead to more scientifically minded outcomes:

If the policymakers choose to adopt a policy that goes against the evidence, that’s OK, Glover says because other considerations – social, economic, ethical, philosophical – might be more important. “And I think that’s quite justifiable,” she says.

Additional Resources:

- [Farming as rocket science](#), Economist
- [Oregon counties vote on measures to ban GMO farming to guard organic farmers from ‘contamination’](#), XiaoZhi Lim, Genetic Literacy Project
- [Will European opposition to GM foods slow biomedical advances?](#), XiaoZhi Lim, Genetic Literacy Project