

The Rt Hon Chris Huhne MP
Secretary of State

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Our ref: PO2011/17769/BS

c/o Helena Paul

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Dear all,

Thank you for your email dated 26 September about the Stratospheric Particle Injection for Climate Engineering (SPICE) project. I apologise for the delay in replying.

You have requested that the Government suspends the SPICE project. That is a decision for the research councils conducting the research, who I understand are writing to you separately. British science is underpinned by the "Haldane principle", which stipulates that decisions on individual research proposals are best taken by researchers themselves through peer review. Prioritisation of an individual research council's spending is not a decision for Ministers.

As you acknowledge, the CBD Decision (X/33) allows small-scale experiments that meet certain conditions. We believe the SPICE project has the necessary approvals processes in place to ensure these conditions are met.

Our priority is to tackle the human causes of global warming at source by reducing human emissions of greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, the UK has set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% (relative to 1990 levels) by 2050. We do not accept that the conduct of research into geoengineering is a distraction from the need for deep emissions cuts and recognise that some geo-engineering techniques *may* have a role to play in the future in supporting our mitigation efforts. However, current understanding of the risks, benefits, impacts, costs and feasibility of these techniques is at a very low level. Geoengineering research is not a first step to deployment; rather it increases understanding of the issue and allows rational discussion and evidence-based policy to be developed.

We do not accept that the conduct of publicly-funded geoengineering research gives rise to a conflict of interests; neither does it undermine the UK's position in either the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) or the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The UK is committed to work towards an ambitious global climate deal that will limit emissions and explore the creation of new international sources of funding for the purpose of climate change adaptation and mitigation. Geoengineering research will not divert us from our commitment to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the 2°C goal set in Copenhagen and endorsed in Cancun.


CHRIS HUHNE