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1. Yatton Against Pylons have set up a website to fight the National Grid Hinkley Point C Connection Project. See also news289.1.

<http://yattonagainstpylons.co.uk/>

2. Other groups fighting the 400kV Hinkley Point line include

<http://www.no-moor-pylons.co.uk/>

<http://www.pylon-moor-pressure.co.uk/>

<http://www.pylonthepressure.co.uk/>

<http://save-our-valley.co.uk/>

3. From the save-our-valley web site: We have just heard that National Grid are extending the consultation period for the Hinkley C Connection Project to 22 January as some local councils have been unable to meet this week due to adverse weather conditions. So if you do come across anyone who thinks it is too late to write, do tell them that they still have time.

4. From BBC news 16-1-10: Rival drug advice panel launched \* An independent group designed to give "politically neutral" information about the risks of drugs is being launched. Full story (with video clips of Prof David Nutt who has launched the new body and sound clip of Colin Blakemore):

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/-/1/hi/uk/8460555.stm>

5. The new drug advice panel is a rival to the statutory Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) from which David Nutt was sacked as chairman (news284.8 and its Appendix A). In interview David Nutt said "We will do the science" and "the ACMD isn't a scientific body". Yes, that addresses the structural problem described in news284. Also the members of the new panel are sufficiently well recognised in the establishment, and the panel appears to have sufficiently reliable funders, that it may work.

6. A rival scientific panel on EMF (both for power frequency and for mobile phones) would also be a Good Thing, to deliver independent advice in a plural system. It would be a rival to the residual statutory from the old NRPB now subsumed in the HPA. However, finding enough members sufficiently well recognised in the establishment looks out of reach, because the establishment has closed ranks. There might be a better chance at the international level, but that remains somewhat polarised and would take time.

7. There are wider lessons here, which should have been learned from the Phillips Report after BSE. As argued in news284, it is important for scientific assessment to be independent and separated from the entrained policy issues, as far as practically achievable. It would be a Great Step to have advisory panels appointed (and dismissed) entirely independently of government, perhaps by a combination of “constituencies” including scientific learned bodies. In the case of EMF it would not seem appropriate to rely exclusively on the rather narrow professional bodies for “radiation protection”; they underpin ICNIRP and its controversial standards. A second Great Step would be to have rival advisory bodies more generally, to expose government to genuine plurality of valid scientific assessment; science is intrinsically uncertain, especially at its frontiers.

8. Similar concerns about public confidence in science arise with the UK Met Office debate about long-term weather forecasting. This gets mixed up with highly sensitive “political correctness” over climate change. Concern is expressed by members of the University of East Anglia’s school of environmental sciences, now notorious for leaked emails revealing a disposition to spin. They seem to be championing the models and challenging the observational data! While there is always observational error, it is not the only place, and not usually the first place, to look for explanations of failed predictions! Two professors at UEA call for the Met Office to drop long-term forecasts – hardly helpful to public confidence when the motive seems to be to suppress news which challenges the political models. It would be better to let the Met Office express these uncertain forecasts in their own careful scientific terms, and to get rid of the political PR overlay which comes out with terms like “barbecue summer”.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/8462890.stm>

9. The above BBC item on long-term weather forecasting mentions another “rival” body, WeatherAction, convened by Piers Corbyn, with apparently high rates of success confirmed by audit. Independent audit of scientific assessment and advisory bodies is another important aspect of good advice which could have a positive bearing on public confidence in science. There is a glaring lack of transparent and independent audit of the established advisory bodies in the field of EMF.

<http://www.weatheraction.com/>