Joint
MEDIA RELEASE

Independence of EFSA's GMO risk assessment challenged

Complaint filed with the EU Ombudsman

Munich/ Brussels, 21.3.2012 Testbiotech, supported by Corporate Observatory Europe (CEO), is today filing a new complaint with the EU Ombudsman questioning the independence of the chair of the panel of experts tasked with assessing the risk of new genetically engineered plants entering the European Union. Harry Kuiper has chaired the GMO Panel at the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) since 2003 but has also maintained strong ties with International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) including taking part in a task force led by a Monsanto employee. ILSI is funded by the food and agrochemical industry and Kuipers work on the task force was alongside staff from Bayer, Dow AgroSciences, Dupont and Syngenta, all of which produce genetically engineered plants.

Testbiotech research has shown that the work of this ILSI task force has directly influenced Kuiper's work at EFSA. Kuiper is expected to leave the GMO panel within the next few months as he comes to the end of his term. Christoph Then of Testbiotech said: "We urgently need more clarity. Harry Kuiper has been involved in each and every case of risk assessment of genetically engineered plants since the start of EFSA. The public has a right to know if consumers and the environment were really protected in the best possible way."

Nina Holland from Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) added: "Harry Kuiper's position as a chair of the GMO Panel is a clear case of conflict of interest. This raises important questions about the decisions made while he was chair and we want the Ombudsman to investigate this. "

EFSA recently introduced new rules to improve its independence, which has been welcomed by many observers [1]. Testbiotech and CEO remain concerned that the problem of widespread conflicts of interest has not been solved. A number of EFSA experts have strong ties to the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) and EFSA has not taken action to remedy this.

The EU Ombudsman has already upheld another complaint concerning the former head of the GMO unit at EFSA, Suzy Renckens who went through the "revolving doors" to work as a lobbyist for the biotech industry. In December 2011, the Ombudsman came up with a first recommendation stating that, *"EFSA should acknowledge that it failed to observe the relevant procedural rules."* It was Renckens that at her time at EFSA was responsible for overseeing conflicts of interest in the GMO panel, and who should have acted on the case of Harry Kuiper.

Contacts:
Nina Holland, Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), ceonina@corporateeurope.org, Tel. +32 (0)2 893 0930, Mobile: +31 (0) 6 302 85 042 , www.corporateeurope.org

Christoph Then, Testbiotech, info@testbiotech.org, Tel. + 4915154638040, www.testbiotech.org

Links to relevant documents:

Letter to the Ombudsman:
http://www.testbiotech.de/sites/default/files/Testbiotech%20letter%20to%20Ombudsman_March_2012_0.pdf

The complaint:
http://www.testbiotech.de/sites/default/files/Testbiotech%20complaint%20EU%20Ombudsman_Kuiper_1.pdf

Testbiotech report “European Food Safety Authority: A playing field for the biotech industry”,
http://www.testbiotech.de/sites/default/files/EFSA_Playing_Field_of_ILSI.pdf

Corporate Europe Observatory Report: “Conflicts on the menu - A decade of industry influence at the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)”, http://www.corporateeurope.org/publications/conflicts-menu

The case of Suzy Renckens and the previous case of the EU Ombudsman:
http://www.testbiotech.org/en/independence

[1] EFSA information on the interpretation of the new rules on independence indicates that experts would be allowed to be involved in ILSI actvities, except “if the subject matter of the taskforce or working group included any advice or development of assessment methods for regulated products or substances, that would be considered as activity V.B (ad hoc or occasional consultancy)”. Activities in this category (current or historic) are not allowed for panel chairs and vice-chairs; and current activities are not allowed for regular panel members. Kuiper's activities for the ILSI biotech taskforce is unlikely to have been allowed as this taskforce promoted concepts relevant for GMO risk assessment.