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Draft – Proposed Berlin Declaration

New technologies have the potential to provide significant benefits to society, but they can also be controversial. Indeed the controversies surrounding new technologies have often led to a backlash against their development, as has been seen in the fields of genetically modified organisms and nuclear power. It is essential that research into such technologies has a social licence to operate by conforming to international and domestic rules and ethical standards that at a minimum will require thorough evaluation and transparent engagement with society.

The emergence of interest in climate geoengineering, broadly defined as the deliberate large-scale manipulation of the planetary environment to counteract climate change, has provoked controversy about the practicality and wisdom of such ideas.

We are aware that some researchers are currently proposing to conduct solar radiation management (SRM) experiments in the ambient environment. While these are on a scale that would appear to present no immediate physical danger, we note that this is the most controversial of geoengineering proposals. We also note that there is no bright-line boundary between SRM research and implementation, hence it is important that early experiments also establish a clear pattern of environmental and social responsibility from the very beginning of experimental work in this area.

We therefore call upon governments, research funding organizations and scientific and professional bodies to withhold approval or endorsement of any experimental work on such techniques without the establishment of an open and transparent review process that ensures that such experiments have the necessary social licence to operate.

At a minimum such a review process should involve prior disclosure of research plans in order to reassure the public as to the integrity of the process, independent evaluation of all existing evidence, plans and results, and should actively seek public participation. These requirements are reflected in the Oxford Principles and the Asilomar Principles and have been broadly endorsed by policymakers and researchers in this field.

We believe that failure to do this will seriously undermine the scientific integrity and public legitimacy of such experimental work.

For suggested amendments, please contact Tim Kruger by email on tim.kruger@oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk by 13:00 on Wednesday 20 August.