

Draft response to Lord Hunt of Chesterton re NERC consultations with UN re “distributing iron particles in the ocean”:

1. NERC has not directly funded an ocean iron addition study since 2004. NERC-supported researchers have, however, investigated ‘natural ocean fertilization’ around islands in the Southern Ocean, and they have also participated in international iron addition* experiments, most recently in 2009.

*Note that “iron particles” are not used, since (unless treated to increase buoyancy and solubility) these would be biologically unavailable.

2. Researchers’ plans for future iron addition experiments have been discussed at the international level under the auspices of the international ISIS consortium (In-Situ Iron Studies, co-chaired by US and UK; www.isisconsortium.org). ISIS is committed to following internationally accepted practices regulating iron fertilization research being developed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) under the London Convention/London Protocol (LC/LP).
3. LC/LP approval is expected to involve an impact assessment of the proposed research, and the framework for that impact assessment is well-developed. However, the legal aspects of the LC/LP approval process have yet to be agreed, and consultations at this stage would therefore be premature.
4. Defra has lead responsibility for UK representation on IMO and LC/LP. However, NERC representation has also been included in Working Groups where ocean fertilization and its regulation have been discussed.
5. Other UN bodies with interests in ocean fertilization include the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).
6. NERC leads the UK representation at IOC, and has contributed to discussions of ocean fertilization at the IOC Assembly and IOC Executive Council meetings. There was UK co-authorship (via NERC support) of the IOC report “Ocean Fertilization: A Scientific Summary for Policy Makers” (2010)
7. The CBD is currently carrying out an assessment of potential impacts on geoengineering, including ocean fertilization, on biodiversity. There is UK involvement, via NERC and other bodies, in the expert group carrying out that assessment.