

Lecture by Erik Millstone, 16 March 2006: The lessons of BSE for science-based risk governance

Professor Erik Millstone is a Professor of Science Policy at the University of Sussex. He trained initially in Physics, but then gained 3 postgraduate degrees in Philosophy. Since 1974 he has been researching into the causes, consequences and regulation of technological change in the food industry. From 1998 to 2004 he was researching into the links between the science and politics of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy. He is now the principal investor on a European Commission funded 9-country comparative study of obesity policy, and a 6-country comparative study of risk assessment policy making.

Abstract

The BSE crisis that erupted in March 1996, and the BSE policy saga of which it is a key moment, highlighted many of the serious shortcomings in the ways in which science-based risk governance has been managed in the UK and the EU. This paper will provide an analysis of the key lessons of the BSE saga and crisis, and locate them in the context of theoretical analysis of the ways in which science and policy-making can and do interact. It will argue that while some lessons have been learnt, they have mainly been the easy lessons, while many of the more difficult lessons remain to be appreciated by public policy-makers and by their expert advisory bodies.