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INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON GROUP ON RISK ASSESSMENT

WORKING TOGETHER ON RISK ISSUES ACROSS GOVERNMENT - PROGRESS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE WAY FORWARD

A Paper by the Secretariat

Summary

Paper ILGRA/May01/05 examines ways to improve collaboration in the light of the Phillips report. This paper reviews previous ILGRA initiatives to promote 'joined-up' working on risk issues by administrative means. The paper invites ILGRA to take stock of those that have been successful and not-so-successful, and to consider further ways by which progress can be made.

Working together - why?

1. Drivers mentioned in previous ILGRA papers and in discussion include:
 - w the Modernising Government White Paper with its emphasis on ensuring policy making is more joined-up and strategic;
 - w the rapid growth of new technology, which provides scope for new ways of working;
 - w the Performance and Innovation Unit report *Wiring it Up*; and
 - w the Phillip's Report and the Government's interim response.

Working together - ILGRA

2. The first ILGRA report to Ministers in 1996, the second in 1998 and several ILGRA papers have proposed a number of initiatives to promote greater Departmental co-ordination and co-operation on risk issues. The more successful ones include:

- w arranging joint research to tackle current and emerging risk issues, e.g. on risk communication and, more recently, social amplification of risk;

- w sharing good practice, where Departments act as repositories of good practice on particular issues; and
- w tabling ILGRA papers which demonstrate joined-up working in action, e.g. ILGRA/MAY00/03 on flood defence policy where the Environment Agency work closely with DETR and MAFF.

3. These successes have helped to put ILGRA 'on the map'. However, in the course of its work a number of other initiatives have been proposed on which progress has been patchy. These include:

- i) mechanisms within Departments to help secure more consistent and coherent policies¹;
- ii) seeking continued and increased support at senior level for involvement in ILGRA work²;
- iii) promoting exchange of staff to work on topical risk issues³; and
- iv) greater exchange of information and data⁴ with a scoping study to look at how to overcome some of the constraints⁵.

4. Patchy progress may in part be due to the effort ILGRA has devoted to aiding the development of Departmental frameworks - an important exercise in itself and one that has become a political priority.

5. However, the drivers for more joined up working are strengthening - reaction to the foot and mouth crisis has shown increasing public intolerance of a 'silo mentality' within Departments. Furthermore, the forthcoming evaluation of Departmental frameworks may expose inconsistencies, both within and between Department's approaches, which will need to be addressed.

6. It is, therefore, appropriate to review both the successful and not-so-successful initiatives and take stock. In terms of those that have not been so successful:

- w One approach to securing more consistent and coherent policies (3(i)) is the establishment of central coordinating risk units within Departments. A few Departments (MAFF for example) are proposing to establish these, but are there other ways of achieving the objective?
- w The problem of lack of support at senior level for ILGRA work (3(ii)) stems from the informal nature of its work - a factor that in other ways is an advantage. One practical step, already proposed, towards seeking greater support at senior level would be for members to include ILGRA participation in their individual workplans. Are there other approaches?

¹ ILGRA/MAY00/02 and ILGRA/MAY00/06

² 2nd ILGRA Report - para. 77 for example.

³ ILGRA/OCT99/07 in discussion.

⁴ 1st ILGRA Report - paras. 131 - 132

⁵ ILGRA/MAR98/04

- w Promoting exchange of staff to work on topical risk issues (3(iii)) is not unique to ILGRA. The difficulties might be summarised as the need to 'give' as well as 'take' when resources everywhere are tightly stretched.

- w The need for greater exchange of information (3(iv)) may be receding as FoI and e-business strategies increasingly prompt greater availability of Departmental databases on the internet and intranets.

7. However, in addition to these specific points, cultural differences between Departments remain. The implication is that, although much has already been achieved, it will take time to break out of the 'silo mentality'.

Action

8. ILGRA members are invited to:

- i) suggest how ILGRA can build on its successes (paragraph 2), and in particular the areas in which further joint research would most useful;
- ii) suggest which of the as yet not-so-successful initiatives should be pursued, and what alternative approaches might be adopted (paragraphs 3 and 6); and
- iii) propose new initiatives to continue to strengthen ILGRA's contribution to joined up working on risk.

9. If members agree, ILGRA's third report to Ministers will pick up the suggestions and proposals made.

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