

Agency (FSA), announced that meat and milk from cloned cows was safe to eat, a striking aspect of media activity was the contrast between fulsome reports in the 'upmarket' newspapers and minimal coverage in the mass circulation tabloids, some of which ignored the announcement entirely. Presumably this reflected their responses to inherently reassuring news.

"Cloned meat declared safe to eat" ran a banner headline across the top of page 1 of *The Daily Telegraph* on 26 November. Beneath, Consumer Affairs Editor Harry Wallop relayed comments from Andrew Wadge, the FSA's Chief Scientist, that an independent study by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) had shown no material differences between meat or milk from cloned and conventionally reared cattle. His remarks paved the way for these products to be made available in UK shops, and was "the clearest indication yet that the controversial farming practice could be accepted officially".

The background to the study was unusual. Referring to the row over the allegedly illegal presence in the UK human food chain of food from cloned animals, Wallop explained the dilemma facing the ACNFP at that time. "The advisory committee could not issue a safety ruling because it had not received an application from a producer wanting to sell milk or meat from a cloned animal," he wrote. So the FSA, "keen to try to clear up the complex issue, commissioned an investigation into a hypothetical request to sell products from cloned cattle."

The article included a cautionary comment from Dairy UK that, while evidence was "piling up" on the safety of food from cloned animals, uncertainty remained as to whether farmers would "battle against public opinion and submit an application to sell milk". On behalf of the RSPCA, David Bowles said that, although there appeared to be growing acceptance that some forms of milk and meat could be allowed for human consumption, the RSPCA's opposition was based on welfare issues. "The scientific studies are clear: animals suffer and are more likely to die during the cloning process."

In a similar article in *The Guardian*, David Batty reported the FSA as

stating that it would be impossible to set up a regime to trace and label food coming from farms with cloned animals. He also highlighted an unresolved problem arising from a European Commission proposal to ban such food.

Meanwhile, under the headline "Food from cloned cow safe to eat", a brief piece by *Daily Mirror* Science Editor Mike Swain informed readers that the FSA verdict could mean food from cloned animals being in the shops "soon". The *Daily Express*, on the other hand, provided a comment from the Soil Association that "there are many unanswered questions on the issue of cloning animals — both ethical and practical — and insufficient regulation. Not only does cloning have a negative impact on animal welfare, we also have no long-term evidence for the impacts on health."

The *Daily Mail* amplified these concerns and added others. "Animal welfare campaigners, including the RSPCA and Compassion in World Farming, insist cloning is cruel. There are high levels of premature miscarriage, organ failure and gigantism among clones," wrote Consumer Affairs Editor Sean Poulter. "Consumer research in Britain and Europe shows huge opposition among the public, while supermarkets have made clear they do not want cloned farm food."

Perhaps the most telling aspect of the coverage was a large number of radio and TV items introduced by words such as "A government advisory committee has concluded that meat and milk from cloned cows poses no dangers to human health. But are they *really* safe?" Although the items were all reassuring, this last question will have left many listeners with suspicions.

A week later, another *Daily Mail* (4 December) front page splash ("Minister rejects ban despite health and animal welfare fears. Cloned Meat Gets Go-Ahead") claimed that government ministers "want to allow the unrestricted sale of meat and milk from so-called Frankenstein animals". The decision, Sean Poulter said, would trigger "a fierce consumer backlash".

Bernard Dixon is the European editor of the American Association for Microbiology.

New support for polar bears and tigers

Two events have bolstered conservation efforts. **Nigel Williams** reports.

Two iconic threatened mammals won improved protection in different moves last month but conservationists were concerned that even more will be needed to help secure the future for polar bears and tigers.

The Obama administration announced that an area of more than 187,000 square miles of mostly ice off the north coast of Alaska is now designated as a protected area for polar bears.

Tom Strickland, assistant secretary for fish and wildlife parks, announcing the protected area, said: "This critical habitat designation enables us to work with federal partners to ensure their actions within its boundaries do not harm polar bear populations. Nevertheless, the greatest threat to the polar bear is the melting of its sea ice caused by human-induced climate change. We will continue to work toward comprehensive strategies for the long-term survival of this iconic species."

The designated area includes large parts of Beaufort and Chukchi seas. About 96 per cent of the area is sea ice. But the new move does not mean an automatic ban on drilling or other activities in the area, only that any application will be subject to review. The strength of this review process will be tested quickly, with decisions pending on whether to let drilling go ahead.

The Centre for Biological Diversity has long campaigned for the endangered status for the polar bear, with the cause of its decline as reduction in sea ice as a result of the effects of human activity on climate change. George Bush's administration eventually agreed to the threatened status rather than endangered, which would have led to greater protection. This decision is currently subject to a court challenge.

The two populations of polar bears in the US both live within the new designated area. Populations are also found in Canada and Russia.



Doubling goal: A new initiative launched in St Petersburg last month aims to double wild tiger numbers by 2022. (Photo: ©naturepl.com/François Savigny/WWF.)

But the focus of Russian conservationists last month was on the tiger, when the first tiger summit was held in St Petersburg. The high profile conservation conference was called by the Russian prime minister, Vladimir Putin, and chief of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, and aimed to mobilise political, financial and celebrity support for a goal of doubling the number of wild tigers by 2022.

Celebrities, such as Leonardo diCaprio, who pledged \$1 million personally, and Naomi Campbell, joined the Chinese premier, Wen Jiahao, and the prime ministers of Nepal and Bangladesh.

The leaders endorsed the Global Tiger Recovery Programme, an action plan to strengthen reserves,

crack down on poachers and provide financial incentives to maintain a thriving tiger population.

During the summit, major donors including Germany, WWF, the Wildlife Conservation Society and international financial institutions, promised \$320 million over the next five years towards doubling their population. The 13 nations containing wild tigers are also spending substantial sums on related projects.

“Overall this summit has been positive for tigers but it won’t stop poaching and trafficking because they haven’t put in place a mechanism to support enforcement,” said Steven Galster, director of Freedland, an organisation that helps to train wildlife authorities in south-east Asia.

Ice stars in new climate exhibition

Following criticism of its earlier efforts to present an exhibition on climate change for the public, the Science Museum in London launched this month a new gallery aiming to focus on the science. The previous exhibition last October was seen by many as an effort to persuade people of the dangers of global warming. ‘Prove it! All the evidence you need to believe in climate change’ grated with many at this time of widespread questioning of some of the activities of researchers.

So the new gallery is taking a more neutral stance on the role of man-made emissions in global warming and is instead focusing on the science carried out by researchers investigating the climate.

And the star of the new exhibition is the display, for the first time, of an Antarctic ice core. These cores, drilled from the ice sheets, represent the accumulation of snow — and air — stretching back from the present to hundreds of thousands of years ago. The trapped air bubbles can be analysed to determine the level of tiny quantities of trace gases, including carbon dioxide, when the air was trapped.

“Ice cores reveal a record of climate and environmental change covering many hundreds of thousands of years. In my experience the sight and story of the extraction of ice cores, and what they tell us, never fails to enthral,” says Chris Rapley, director of the museum.

“At a time when public understanding and engagement with climate change science is recovering from the effects of a turbulent year, these tools provide a wonderful means to communicate and captivate.”

Ice cores have revealed that, during the Earth’s natural ice age cycles, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has varied between 100 parts per million (ppm) in an ice age to around 300ppm in a warm period,