

A role for Local Government GM-free Zones: Why & How

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Locally and regionally, shires, towns and cities can help keep Australia free of Genetically Manipulated (GM) crops and foods. There are many good economic, public health, environmental and social reasons to do so.

The GM industry falsely claims that GM plants, animals and microbes can feed the world. But Failure to Yield, a US Union of Concerned Scientists study found GM crops yielded less than top conventional varieties over the past 12 years. See: <http://www.ucsusa.org/> Claims that GM

crops can solve climate change are also false. No commercial drought or salt tolerant GM crops exist and none are ready for release in the next decade. Systemic changes, not GM bandaids, are essential to making Australia's farms sustainable as oil runs out and climates change..

Why GM-free Zones?

Health:

Scientific evidence shows some GM foods are unsafe but several banned in Europe are approved in Australia. GM soy and corn from North and South America, and some Australian GM cotton and canola, now enter our animal and human food supplies. Adelaide epidemiologist Dr Judy Carman says: "FSANZ does none of its own safety testing, relying instead on company data. But even company trials, limited in their ability to pick up health problems, found some adverse effects." Evidence of harm mounts:

- Over 5,000 people got Eosinophilia-Myalgia Syndrome (EMS) from L-tryptophan, a dietary supplement made by Showa Denko, using GM microbes. Over 1,500 people were permanently disabled and 35 died. Victims got \$1.2 billion;
- Here, CSIRO made GM field peas weevil resistant, splicing in a gene from beans. ANU trials found mice, fed cooked or uncooked GM peas, all had a very serious allergic reaction.

(J Agricultural and Food Chemistry). FSANZ would not have required this experiment;

- Dr Irina Ermakova fed soy to two groups of pregnant rats - Monsanto's GM Roundup tolerant soy or ordinary soy. Pups in the GM soy group died at much higher rates and had stunted growth. Austrian research confirms her findings of health impacts on the offspring of experimental animals. Yet FSANZ refuses to review Roundup Ready soy, approved here;
- Toxicologist Dr Arpad Pusztai fed conventional and GM potatoes to two groups of rats. The GM group had damaged immune systems and organs and smaller brains, livers and testicles. Dr Pusztai reports: "some effect from the process of genetic engineering itself caused the damaged organs and immune dysfunction."

For more information and advice see:
<http://www.truefood.org.au/resourcesandinfo/> and
<http://www.i-sis.org.uk/biotechnology.php>

Environment:

Herbicide tolerant GM canola will raise weed control costs for local government as weeds become Roundup tolerant. A few Australian farmers grow Roundup Ready GM canola, to spray over the growing crop to kill weeds without harming the plants. Tasmania has GM canola contamination, from trials in the 1990s, so they banned commercial GM crops in 2003 and extended their ban this year until 2014, with all-party support. Despite best efforts, by 2006 only 3 of 58 contaminated sites were clear. The DPI reported: "sites still exhibit high numbers of germinating seedlings indicating strict management must continue to apply." Where GM crops are grown in Canada and the USA, the

amount of herbicide used by farmers has risen fifteen-fold since GM crops were first planted in 1996. Eight weeds in the USA resist Roundup. And in Australia, canola volunteers from seed spilled on roadsides, field margins, railways and parks will require tank mixes for control once canola pollen has outcrossed to related wild radish, turnip, charlock and other brassica weeds. The \$4-5 billion pa cost of weed control will rocket when GM tolerant crops have made Roundup, our most used herbicide, useless.

For more information see:
<http://www.foe.org.au/sustainable-food/media/news-items/front-page-news-feed-1/new-report-gm-crops-increase-pesticide-use>

How GM-free Zones?

Local government can and should protect and nurture sustainable food and fibre production systems in Australia. Oil is running out and our climates are changing. So industrial agribusiness, dependent on oil-based inputs for fuels, fertilisers and pesticides, must be phased out - the sooner, the better. Family farmers and gardeners, sustainably managing soils, vegetation and animals offer future food security for our nation. But Genetically Manipulated crops, animals and microbes would entrench our dependence on industrial farming and stall the transition to future farming systems and sustainable landscape management.

These proposals draw on the successful nuclear-free zones campaigns of the 1980s. They are a good guide to implementing successful GM-free Zones in your area. Over the past 9 years, at least 100 Australian councils passed various GM-free motions to support state government GM bans. Now some

Resolutions:

Councils can and should declare GM-free Zones by passing and implementing GM-free resolutions:

1. amend food service contracts, to require GM-free foods be supplied for all council food services. It is a simple, quick and cost-neutral as Food Standards Australia NZ (FSANZ) requires food processors to know if ingredients are GM, though most need not be labeled. Vulnerable people need protection so many councils require their food services to crèches, hospitals, meals on wheels, catering, etc. to be GM-free. It only takes a minor contractual change. Gene Ethics can provide a legal opinion on the powers of councils, if required.

2. erect GM-free Zone signs in and around the municipality to reflect the mood of local people and promote awareness that GM crops and foods pose various threats. Nuclear-free zone signs posted in many council areas in the 1980s had very positive effects on state and federal government policy on nuclear arms. SA has extended its GM ban with a quarantine law to prohibit the passage of any GM canola into or across its territory. Local councils can propose the same to their state governments, which have the power to establish GM and GM-free Zones over all or part of their jurisdictions.

3. Publish a GM-free Zone Declaration that could be signed by all sympathetic ratepayers and published in local media, on the council website and on notice boards. It would have positive effects similar to the nuclear free zone declarations of the 1980s. Local businesses and

bans have been lifted - in NSW, Victoria and WA – local government has a key role in promoting GM-free farms and foods. Please renew your GM-free Zone commitment as many councils have already done in the past 12 months. The GM-free register is at: <http://www.geneethics.org>

organisations would also support the GM-free Zone Declaration. For instance, in 2003 the Bega Shire Council became GM-free with the support of its Chamber of Commerce and the shire's major industry leader, Bega Cheese.

4. establish a local register to record and map the location of any GM sites that may come into the area. A similar register has been established on the Gene Ethics website for businesses, farms, food processors and councils which declare themselves GM-free. Call on the state government for an online register (including maps), with the locations of GM canola sites - both experimental and commercial - so that GM-free producers (farmers, beekeepers, etc) can avoid those areas.

5. Write to the Premier, state and federal Agriculture Ministers to:

- **extend the ban** on commercial GM canola for at least five years as Tasmania and SA have done:
- **declare the municipality a GM-free Zone** by using its powers to create GM and GM-free areas (these state powers derive from a policy made under Section 21 of the Commonwealth Gene Technology Act 2000).
- **pass strict liability laws** to hold GM companies fully accountable for any GM impacts, including genetic contamination. The alternative is farmers suing farmers for contamination, though it is inevitable with canola pollen and seed.
- **all foods and animal feed made using GM technology to be fully labeled.** Shoppers and farmers have the right to know the source of food and feed products.