



ALP Response – Gene Ethics

Does your party have a policy on GM and its products?

Federal Labor understands that some community members are concerned about genetically modified crops and food. Protecting human health and the environment remains our highest priority. This work will continue to be overseen by the Gene Technology Regulator, which administers and enforces the Gene Technology Act to protect the safety of people and the environment. If at any stage the regulator is not satisfied that protection is in place, a licence is not granted.

The Gillard Labor Government supports this existing national framework for managing and regulating Genetically Modified (GM) crops and food. GM crops should only be released to farmers if they are safe for human health and the environment. GM foods should not be approved for sale unless they have been assessed as safe.

However, even once they pass that safety test, labelling laws ensure consumers can make an informed choice. Food containing DNA and/or protein from genetic modification must be labelled 'genetically modified'.

Once a GM crop has been assessed as safe for commercial release, decisions on whether it is allowed to be grown in part or all of a State or Territory are a matter for that jurisdiction.

After these human health and environmental safety concerns have been thoroughly considered, the Gillard Labor Government believes that GM technology is one part of the solution in helping to deal with future challenges, including climate change, global food supplies and the management of pests and diseases. This technology can also benefit the environment, through crops which require much lower chemical use.

If elected, will your party's MPs advocate and work to:

- 1. Require all foods made using genetic manipulation and other new processes with a limited history of safe use to be labelled, including foods now exempt from labelling – GM vegetable oils, starches and sugars, products of animals fed GM feedstuff, animal feed, animal clones and their offspring etc...?**

The Gillard Labor Government supports the existing robust national framework for managing and regulating GM crops and food. GM crops should only be released to farmers if they are safe for human health and the environment. GM foods should not be approved for sale unless they have been assessed as safe.

However, even once they pass that safety test, labelling laws ensure consumers can make an informed choice. Food containing DNA and/or protein from genetic modification must be labelled 'genetically modified'.

The Gillard Labor Government recognises the importance of food labelling to protect public health and safety and ensure consumers can make an informed choice about the food they buy. We remain committed to simplifying and strengthening food labelling laws to benefit Australian consumers.

Existing food labelling measures in Australia include the Trade Practices Act, which ensures that any claim, representation, implication or impression on labelling or promotional material must be accurate and not misleading.

Federal Labor has also acted to amend this legislation to support a 'Grown In' label for food. In July, the Labor Government introduced the new Grown In label which means Australia now has a legally enforceable system, the food product must be grown in the country claimed if the label is used.

Grown In allows consumers to clearly and easily distinguish between food products by origin and thereby support Australian producers if they choose to. When consumers see 'Grown In' Australia, they will know the product was grown by one of our farmers on our land.

2. Sign and ratify the International Biosafety (Cartagena) Protocol, the first and only treaty under the UN Convention on Biodiversity, that aims for the safe international transfer, handling and use of GMOs?

Australia has a long-standing record of active and constructive participation in both the parent Convention the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and the Biosafety Protocol.

At present, the Gillard Labor Government is still considering the Cartagena Protocol. In the interim, Australia continues to engage as an "active non-party" in formal negotiations with Parties to the Protocol. In this way, Australia is able to work with other like-minded nations to ensure the Protocol effectively achieves its environmental objectives.

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3. Amend the EPBC Act to require the Environment Minister to review the biodiversity impacts of all commercial GMO release proposals?

Late last year, after an extensive consultation process, the final report of Dr Allan Hawke's review of the EPBC Act was released. Dr Hawke supported the current requirement for the Gene Technology Regulator to seek the advice of the Environment Minister for applications to release a GMO into the environment, including with regard to impacts on biodiversity. Dr Hawke suggested that the Gene Technology Regulator should continue to take into account this advice in the assessment of potential risks to the environment from the release of a GMO.

If re-elected, a Gillard Labor Government will bring forward a comprehensive response to this review in the next term of government.

4. Amend the law to prohibit the patenting of living organisms and other products of nature, including their genetic components?

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5. Increase public investment in sustainable agricultural systems that respond to the end of oil and phosphates and the onset of climate change by reducing spending on GM crop, animal and food research?

Investment in sustainable agricultural systems

The Gillard Labor Government is helping our farmers prepare for climate change and support jobs and future productivity. More than 10,000 Australian farmers and 67 industry organisations have taken up FarmReady training grants which boost training opportunities for farmers and Indigenous land managers and enable farming and natural resource management groups to adapt and respond to the impacts of climate change.

Through Federal Labor's *Australia's Farming Future* initiative and our research partners, more than \$130 million is being invested under a Climate Change Research Program into areas including soil carbon, biochar, reducing livestock emissions and nitrous oxide emissions. This includes \$46.2 million from Federal Labor and \$84 million leveraged through research partners.

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We have also provided \$70 million for the CSIRO's Sustainable Agricultural National Research Flagship.

We are investing in local projects through the LandCare and Caring for our Country programs to help communities improve the productivity of farming land and support a healthy environment. The Gillard Labor Government has invested over \$80 million on 630 Landcare projects across the country, and we allocated an extra \$15 million for Caring for our Country in the 2010-11 Budget, for projects to be delivered over the next three years.

The increased funding reflects the Gillard Labor Government's strong support for Landcare and the 100,000 volunteers carrying out vital work in communities across the nation.

Federal Labor has also invested more than \$45 million in Environmental Stewardship, which provides payments to farmers to protect high value native vegetation on their land.

We have provided more than \$1.3 billion to local, regional and nationally significant projects through Caring for our Country, including targeting weeds and pests such as lantana and rabbits, protecting sensitive wetlands, improving farmland productivity and investing in the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

We are also supporting grassroots community groups with more than \$15 million announced in 2010-11 for small grants to support local priorities, including in coastal rehabilitation, sustainable farming and Indigenous partnerships.

6. Hold a public review of GM research into synthetic organisms, terminator, animals for organ transplant, microbes, trees, fish, insects etc..?

No. All medical research in Australia funded by the NHMRC is peer reviewed, assessed for scientific merit and good clinical research practice, and undergoes an ethics review. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) supports research conducted to the highest ethical standards that lead to long term health, economic and social benefits for all Australians. The integrity, robustness and efficiency of its peer review processes ensure that NHMRC funds the best, most relevant research.

Review and amend the commonwealth Gene Technology Act to:

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- **Amend the definition of ‘environment’ to conform with the EPBC Act and the principles of ecologically sustainable development?**
- **Make providers of commercial GMOs strictly liable for any harm of contamination that their technology or its products cause?**
- **Require GM technology providers to pay the costs of GM dealings including, for instance, buffer zones and segregation systems?**
- **Give all parties full appeal rights on decisions made by the Office of Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR)?**
- **Strengthen the precautionary principle, and apply it to all the assessments of risk for dealings with GMOs?**
- **Require proof that GMOs are safe to health and environment?**
- **Set strict standards for the required rigour and independence of scientific evidence submitted with GMO applications?**
- **Ensure that an absence of conclusive evidence always triggers further independent research before any licences are issued?**
- **Revoke the sections on Emergency Dealing Determinations?**

This work will continue to be overseen by the Gene Technology Regulator, which administers and enforces the Gene Technology Act to protect the safety of people and the environment. If at any stage the regulator is not satisfied that sufficient protection is in place, a licence is not granted. The Gillard Labor Government supports this existing national framework for managing and regulating GM crops and food.