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Tougher GM laws needed now

Widespread non-compliance with the Office of Gene Technology Regulator's safety rules and licenses have been confirmed. They are a siren alert for tough, proactive action. (1)

"The OGTR is now assessing options to deregulate a tsunami of completely new GM techniques (CRISPR; Talen; ZFN; RNAi) and their products, recently invented," (2) says Gene Ethics Director, Bob Phelps.

"Many scientists and the GM industry want the OGTR's regulations amended so the new GM techniques and their products are exempt from regulation immediately.

"But the Gene Technology Act 2000, passed by the Howard Government, clearly mandates that all new GM techniques - most not even imagined then - must be assessed, regulated and licensed under the OGTR's national regime. The Precautionary Principle enshrined in the Act should also apply.

"The new GM techniques have no history of safe use, experimental or commercial.

"And two recent scientific papers confirm that many off-target genome disruptions and effects occur in experimental animals when CRISPR is used to manipulate their DNA. (3,4)

"Novel GM food and crops, humans and animals; fish, trees, insects, and a cornucopia of other living things are being genetically manipulated and created with these new and untried GM tools.

"Food Standards Australia NZ appears set to allow some products of radical new GM methods into our food supplies.

"All Australian Government Health and Agriculture ministries are party to the national GM regulatory system.

"They must intervene now to ensure that the Gene Technology Act is rigorously applied so that all new GM techniques and the living organisms created are fully and strongly regulated before any releases are contemplated.

"Anything less is intolerable and will encounter public opposition," Mr Phelps concludes.

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References:

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