

**MEDIA RELEASE - Friday December 1, 2017**

**Reckless deregulation to fast-track new GM products to market**

**Many new Genetic Manipulation (GM) techniques and their products will be deregulated immediately if the Gene Technology Regulator's proposals are followed. GM plants, animals, and microbes could secretly come onto our plates and into our environments, un-assessed, unsafe and unlabelled.**

"Australian governments framed the Gene Technology Act 2000 and the Gene Technology Scheme 2001 so the Gene Tech Regulator would assess, regulate and license all new and emerging GM techniques and their products, as they are invented, developed and released from laboratories," says Gene Ethics Director Bob Phelps.

**"But now the governments and official regulatory watchdogs want to deregulate** the new wave of GM processes and products - CRISPR and RNAi - invented just five years ago. They have no history of safe use and are prone to unpredictable off-target impacts.

"Scientists agree that among the GM techniques slated for eventual deregulation, Gene Drives may pose the greatest hazards as whole species of living things could be wiped out by these GM Trojan Horses.

The Regulator therefore proposes a rational review process for the use of Gene Drives:

"GMOs containing functional gene drives would require a DNIR (non-release) licence, which would ensure case-by-case evaluation of risks and tailored risk management. ... This interim measure would allow the Regulator to collect more information .... It would be appropriate to re-assess this position at the next Regulations review (in 2022) on the basis of any accumulated experience and scientific developments at that time."<sup>1</sup>

**"This precautionary approach is a step by step procedure** that should apply to all the other new Genetic Manipulation techniques and their products too, until more is known about their risks and hazards and a solid history of safe use is recorded," Mr Phelps says.

**"A process of gradual deregulation of some GM techniques** could then be based on peer-reviewed scientific evidence and fully documented experience which is not yet available. Deregulation of CRISPR and RNA interference now, without such evidence, is extremely foolhardy.

"GM Laws and Regulations are required to focus on protecting human health and safety, and the environment.

"But the Governments and OGTR baldly admit that they have commercial agendas which should be irrelevant to how our GM regulatory and safety systems are designed and operated.

"They reduce the real safety risks of new GM techniques to investment and innovation "risks" that could deter commercial GM interests.

"For instance, the OGTR supports the deregulation of new GM in the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) by writing that there is:

"a risk that ambiguity will inhibit use of the technologies, (so) that basic research may be held back, and that products (such as food crops or human or animal therapeutics) may not be commercialised."

They also fear a risk that there may be: "delays in bringing new products to market," which: "could hamper industry development and affect the international competitiveness of Australian businesses."<sup>1</sup>

**"Corporate Agribusiness, Pharmaceutical, and Industrial interests** dominate public policy on the manipulation of human, animal, plant and microbe genes for profit, so prefer no regulation at all.

**"We call on citizens and parliaments to take back control** of why, when, where, how and by whom living things will be genetically manipulated and to ensure tough regulations apply to them all.

"The uncertain future of all new GM technologies and their living products require our national Regulatory Scheme and GM Regulator to diligently protect us all. That's their job," Mr Phelps concludes.

**More comment: Bob Phelps 0449 769 066 / 03 5968 2996**

1. Technical Review of the Gene Technology Regulations 2001, Consultation documents <http://ogtr.gov.au/internet/ogtr/publishing.nsf/Content/reviewregulations-1>

2. Review of the National Scheme for the Regulation of Gene Technology <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/gene-technology-review>