

GENE ETHICS MEDIA RELEASE

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New CRISPR techniques are GM says top EU court so must be regulated as such in Europe

The European Union's top court has ruled that the new Genetic Manipulation (GM) techniques dubbed CRISPR must be assessed, regulated and licensed, the same as the old transgenic GM techniques were.* Countries that export primary products into the EU may be obliged to follow suit or be excluded from valuable markets.

"This precautionary approach starkly contrasts with Australian government proposals to deregulate new GM techniques and their products even before a history of safe use is established and CRISPR's serious technical issues** are fully explored and resolved," *** says Gene Ethics Director, Bob Phelps.

"The federal Health Department review of the national Gene Technology Scheme, the Gene Technology Regulator's (OGTR) review of its regulations, and Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) all propose that several GM techniques and their products are deregulated now."

"To support their deregulatory stance, they took advice behind closed doors from GM industry and science establishment experts with serious undeclared conflicts of interest in the future of CRISPR and its products."

"But the opinions these 'experts' gave were not backed up with credible scientific evidence in the discussion papers published for community comment."

"The Government and Regulator reports were promised this month, but State and Territory Governments may not agree with gutting Australia's precautionary GM regulatory scheme."

"That would be the effect of deregulating a tsunami of untried, untested and unwanted new methods to genetically manipulate any living organism – animal, plant, microbe or human."

"The EU court ruling correctly found that, "excluding organisms obtained by new mutagenesis techniques from the scope of the GMO Directive would compromise the objective pursued by that directive, which is to avoid adverse effects on human health and the environment, and would fail to respect the precautionary principle which that directive seeks to implement."

"CRISPR techniques are genetic engineering and must not be deregulated unless they are proven safe and have community acceptance, by being processed through a robust regulatory review process," Mr Phelps concludes.

More comment: Bob Phelps 0449 769 066

*The European Court of Justice Media Release

<https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-07/cp180111en.pdf>

** CRISPR disrupts genomes:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/Nbt.4192>

*** The latest scientific findings discussed here:

<https://theconversation.com/crispr-cas9-gene-editing-scissors-are-less-accurate-than-we-thought-but-there-are-fixes-100007>