

"The Hon. Jill Hennessy MP - Vic Minister for Health" <jill.hennessy@parliament.vic.gov.au>, <minister.health@health.vic.gov.au>

October 8, 2018

Dear Minister:

We again call on you and all other members of the Legislative and Governance Forum on Gene Technology to reject the proposed deregulation of new SDN1 Genetic Manipulation (GM) techniques and their living products, when you meet on Thursday, October 11.

The Gene Technology Act 2001 was designed to regulate all new GM methods and does a robust job of doing so, so please vote to continue the precautionary regulation of all the new GM techniques until all technical, social, ethical, and other uncertainties and hazards are resolved. You should not be stampeded into deregulating SDN1 at this very early stage.

Please proceed with extreme caution by continuing to enable our regulators – OGTR, FSANZ, APVMA, TGA – to do the critical assessment, regulatory, licensing and monitoring work that they are empowered and entrusted to do. Their prudent assessments are the main means for society to apply appropriate precaution to the ambitions of some scientists and the profit-driven tactics of the small cartel of mega-corporations – Bayer, ChemChina, Corteva and BASF - that now own and control a majority of the world's crop seed (both conventional and GM) and agricultural synthetic chemicals.

There are also further matters you should consider in reaching your decision to regulate.

First, tonight the ABC TV program Four Cornersⁱ will disclose the secret tactics that global chemical and GM seed giant Monsanto (now Bayer) has used for decades to protect its multi-billion-dollar sales of the weed killer, Roundup. The company used the same disinformation methods to promote GM seed as it patented and owned over 90% of them globally.

Monsanto engaged in a systematic and deliberate campaign to attack any science that found evidence its products are unsafe and attacked any scientist with the courage to question GM seed or Roundup's safety. Four Corners also uncovers Monsanto's influence campaign through CropLife and other Australian institutions – Ausbiotech, ABCA, NFF, etc. - against the public interest.

Second, the new GM techniques can be used to manipulate the genomes of any living organism – animal, plant, microbe or human. Now agriculture and bioweapons are converging as the US military's research arm (DARPA) is funding experiments into GM insects able to spread viruses into corn crops to confer new traits.ⁱⁱ European scientists warn that: "the program may be widely perceived as an effort to develop biological agents for hostile purposes, and their means of delivery."ⁱⁱⁱ DARPA's insect-virus experiments^{iv} dubbed Insect Allies^v may also breach the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention.^{vi}

Yet you are being asked to deregulate these very new GM techniques and their products, with likely impacts on trade, markets, biosecurity, biosafety, and on bioweapons proliferation.

Third, recent studies also suggest that editing genomes with CRISPR may increase the risk of the altered cells triggering cancer.^{vii} It is now known that CRISPR-Cas9 induces larger-than-anticipated mutations in mouse and human cells.^{viii}

On behalf of all Australians, please vote for the continued regulation of all new GM techniques as the Gene Technology Act 2000 now requires.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Phelps". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Executive Director

Encl: 3 attachments – FoE report, Rusk paper, Zischewski et. al. paper.

ⁱ Four Corners. <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/the-monsanto-papers/10342250>

ⁱⁱ Researchers fear Ag and Bioweapons. <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/362/6410/35>

ⁱⁱⁱ Biological war plan? <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/04/us-plan-to-genetically-alter-crops-via-insects-feared-to-be-biological-war-plan>

^{iv} Ag research masks bioweapons development. <https://cosmosmagazine.com/biology/researchers-fear-us-agricultural-research-masks-bioweapons-development>

^v Insect Allies. <https://www.darpa.mil/program/insect-allies>

^{vi} The UN Biological Weapons Convention. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/more/the-biological-weapons-convention-an-introduction/>

^{vii} CRISPR-Edited Cells Linked to Cancer Risk in 2 Studies, Scientific American, June 12 2018.

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/crispr-edited-cells-linked-to-cancer-risk-in-2-studies/>

^{viii} Rusk, N. Surprising CRISPR roadblocks, [Nicole Rusk](#) *Nature Methods* volume 15, page569 (2018)

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41592-018-0097-9>