

## News Media Release | Monday, November 11 Senate should disallow GM deregulation

**Gene Ethics calls on all Senators to disallow the Gene Technology Amendment (2019 Measures No. 1) Regulations 2019 when it comes to a vote in the Senate on Wednesday November 13.**

**All genetic manipulation (GM) processes and products - including all new CRISPR gene-editing techniques and the GM animals, plants and microbes created - must now be notified to the Office of Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) for assessment and licensing, before any release.**

**“But the government’s deregulation would allow the release of GM organisms into our food supply and environment without testing or expert assessment,” says Gene Ethics Director, Bob Phelps.**

“Scientists and industry know the new GM methods are flawed but ambition, short-sightedness and profit motives drive them to back deregulation despite the hazards, risks and costs to others.

“GM deregulation is reckless, unscientific, against current law, and not in the public interest.

“Sidelining the Regulator before the new GM game even begins would create a free for all where industry and science players can make up their own rules, without independent oversight.

“The federal Health Department’s began implementing Gene Technology Scheme Review last month, so Senate disallowance could defer the question of GM deregulation to that more open and transparent public process.

“Trying to remedy the harm and wrongs that premature deregulation does is time consuming, ineffective and enormously expensive, as seen with aged care, banking, child sexual abuse, asbestos, PFAS and flammable cladding on buildings, among a multitude of examples. Premature GM deregulation would be a repeat.

“People and society are harmed for decades, without relief or official notice, until acute crises, a critical mass of victims, and public outrage generate an inquiry to put a band aid on the mess.

“When governments neglect their role and deregulate prematurely, they are responsible for the negative as well as any positive consequences.

“Tasmania’s Government voted against GM deregulation as the state’s GM-free moratorium and marketing strategy to 2029 would be undermined. South Australia, GM-free until 2025, abstained.

“CRISPR, a gene-editing tool, was only invented in 2012 so has scant history of safe use.

**“Gene Ethics wants good science, the law and precaution applied to GM regulation, which all show that the government’s deregulation proposal is premature and the senate should disallow it,” Mr Phelps concludes.**

**More comment: Bob Phelps 0449 769 066**

\* Science Magazine confirms that CRISPR: “sometimes changes genes it shouldn't, and it edits by hacking through both strands of DNA's double helix, leaving the cell to clean up the mess - shortcomings that limit its use in basic research and agriculture and pose safety risks in medicine.” Harvard University biochemist, Prof. George Church, says such breaks are “genome vandalism”. “As the cell attempts to repair the break it introduces insertions and deletions willy-nilly, sometimes creating unwanted - and even dangerous - mutations.” (1)

\* The Smithsonian agrees that: “the repair process might also rope in some stray letters or chop off pre-existing slivers of the genome. CRISPR editing to insert a particular genetic sequence, meanwhile, can leave donor DNA floating in the cell. At the moment, the downstream effects of those fragments are still unclear.” (2)

\* Sythego Corporation says: “CRISPR technology is not foolproof and possesses certain limitations, making the jump from bench to bedside for gene and cell therapies a bigger leap.” (3)

(1) <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/10/new-prime-genome-editor-could-surpass-crispr>

(2) <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/prime-editing-new-form-crispr-technology-make-gene-editing-more-precise-180973381/#iz970IsxCmhJ4SHz.99>

(3) <https://www.synthego.com/blog/prime-editing>