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Media Release

Review set to weaken food labelling: Sydney hearing, Grace Hotel 1-4pm today Monday, March 29, 2010

There is a real danger that the national food labelling review could further weaken our lax labelling laws in the interests of trade. The Review received 6,000 submissions in the first round of comment last November, despite just three weeks notice. The lack of full labelling of genetically manipulated (GM) foods was one of the issues most often raised.

The review's public hearings are poorly publicised. They began in Perth and the second hearing is in Sydney today. Members of the interested public must register on the Food Labelling Review website to attend, but venues and times are only notified to selected people at the last minute.

"We want the food labelling review hearings more widely publicised and open to all members of the interested public to have their say," says Gene Ethics Director Bob Phelps.

"All novel food production processes and materials that have no history of safe use in the human food supply, such as genetic manipulation, food irradiation and nano-materials in food and food packaging, should be fully labelled.

"The Review's issues paper claims most GM food is labelled but exemptions in Food Standard 1.5.2 for vegetable oils, starches and sugars; food processing aids and additives; restaurant meals; meat, milk, eggs, honey etc. from animals fed GM feed; plus a 1% threshold for 'accidental' GM contamination, mean most foods made using Genetic Manipulation are unlabelled.

"As Scientific American and Nature Biotechnology confirm, few independent intergenerational safety tests of GM foods are done because the GM industry systematically withholds the materials and approvals necessary to doing the experiments.

"Without unbiased, long term, peer-reviewed safety tests, full labelling should be required on all foods derived from GM, irradiation, nano-materials and other untried processes, so people can choose whether to run the risks involved," Mr Phelps concludes.

Make public submissions to the Review by email to FoodLabellingReview@health.gov.au till May 14.

Further information or interviews: Vivienne Reiner, Gene Ethics media officer: 0432 352 132; Bob Phelps, Gene Ethics spokesperson: (03) 9347 4500, 0449 769 066

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

1. Full GM labelling is now more urgent, with locally grown GM canola entering our food chain for the [first time](#).
2. Australia's food regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), acknowledges the lack of certainty about the products of new food technologies, by periodically updating scientific information on these foods. Genetically Manipulated foods are among those 'Foods Requiring Pre-Market Clearance' in Standard 1.5.2. Novel, GM and irradiated foods must undergo FSANZ pre-market health and safety assessments (not testing) as they contain materials and/or are manufactured using processes that have no history of safe use in the human food supply.