



Call for Five Year Moratorium on GMO Release

Media Statement: 3 July 2002

Five eminent New Zealanders called for a five-year moratorium on the release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) at today's launch of the Sustainability Council of New Zealand.

The Council believes it will take at least another five years before enough of the science is understood to allow an informed decision on GM release.

In any case, more time is required to consider the enormous trade and marketing risks for New Zealand should GMOs be released for use in agriculture now.

The members of the Sustainability Council of New Zealand are businessman and former Federated Farmers president Sir Peter Elworthy, sporting legend Dame Susan Devoy, Auckland University Professor of Biochemistry Dr Garth Cooper, food author Annabel Langbein, and actor Sam Neill.

"The Council is pro-science and sees real potential in medical and other laboratory applications deriving from gene science" said Council chairman Sir Peter Elworthy.

"However, we share the concerns of the majority of New Zealanders on the issue of GM release" said Sir Peter.

These concerns cover three areas:

- Trade risks to New Zealand
- Effects of GMOs on the environment and human health
- Regulatory issues

"We don't believe the scientific questions behind these concerns can be adequately addressed in less than 5 years" said Sir Peter "Once GMOs are out on our lands through commercial release, they are there for ever."

But the Sustainability Council says the GM debate is far from just a question of scientific uncertainty. "The trade and marketing risks for New Zealand are enormous if GM agriculture is adopted" said Sir Peter.

“A recent survey showed 49% of farmers wanted to see NZ GM-Free while only 21% wanted to grow GM crops.”

Most importantly, consumers in both New Zealand and many of its prime export markets do not want to eat GM food.

“The EU is still our biggest customer for agricultural products and 71% of Europeans say they do not want to eat GM food, no matter what level of testing has been applied. Japanese consumers are also very resistant to food containing GM products” said Sir Peter.

“Why would we deliberately walk away from the successful and highly desirable ‘clean and green’ brand in order to embrace a food production technology that so many key markets are currently resisting.”

“Working through all these issues is going to take far longer than the 15 months left under the current moratorium. We do not prejudge the outcome of that investigation. We just say that it is going to take more time” said Sir Peter. “We acknowledge the Government’s signal that an extension may be necessary.”

“Claims implying that science will be stopped in its tracks by an extended moratorium are not credible.”

“The vast majority of gene science can continue under a moratorium because it does not involve release of GMOs” said Sir Peter

“Debate on genetic modification has been unnecessarily polarised into science versus greens.”

“Yet polling has consistently shown that over 60% of New Zealanders are concerned about the release of GMOs into the environment” said Sir Peter.

Sir Peter said the Sustainability Council had been brought together many months ago with a July launch in mind. “The early election has simply produced a clash of timetables”.

As a nation, we need to feel confident that an independent process of evaluation of the issues is undertaken.

“The Council is independent of any other organisation and will be providing independent research, analysis, and oversight on this issue” said Sir Peter.

Contact Details

Sir Peter Elworthy: 021-323-991

Sustainability Council: 04-913-3655, or Simon Terry 025-444-678

www.sustainabilitynz.org