

## **Environmental Regulator Left to Make Key Economic Calls**

Media Statement 1 September 2003

A select committee review of proposed GM legislation has left a fundamental economic question to an environmental regulator, ERMA said Sustainability Council Executive Director, Simon Terry.

Instead of recommending that the growing of GM food be treated separately to other GM releases, and delayed at least until there is market acceptance of GM food, ERMA has been left to decide whether New Zealand gives up its status as a GM free food producer.

The select committee review has not provided any response to the proposal that the growing of GM crops should be held back when the moratorium lifts. It has cited a technicality as the reason for not considering holding back GM releases in general - as opposed to food alone. The report of the Education and Science select committee says that such amendments are not possible as these would be outside the scope of the NOOM Bill.

However, the Sustainability Council proposed only that the growing of GM food be subject to a five year restraint. Such a restricted period covering only a certain class of GM organisms would not be outside the scope of the Bill. It would operate as a delayed introduction to a section of the legislation.

The failure to treat the growing of GM food separately means that ERMA will be asked to make important economic and marketing judgements when it is simply an environmental regulator. Economic arguments will dominate when applications are made to release GM crops and ERMA is not the right place to make these calls.

ERMA does not have economic expertise and the strict statutory timetable it must work to will often leave insufficient time to research economic impacts.

The analysis that would be required before the nation deliberately gave up its status as a GM Free Food Producer has not been completed. In absence of this, ERMA should not be charged with case by case responsibility. It is now up to the full Parliament to address this issue and amend the Bill.

### **Contact Details**

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