



# **The History of Genetic Modification in New Zealand**

**April 2008**

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# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Purpose	3
1.2 Sustainable Future	3
<b>2. Defining Genetic Modification</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. The Journey Towards the Royal Commission: 1973 - 2000</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1 The New Tool: 1973–1990	6
3.2 The Development of HSNO: 1990–1996	7
3.3 The Public Protest: 1996–2000	8
<b>4. The Royal Commission: 2000 - 2001</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1 The Purpose	10
4.2 The Establishment of the Royal Commission	10
4.3 The Process	11
4.4 The Four Key Findings	11
<b>5. The Response to the Royal Commission: 2001 - 2008</b>	<b>17</b>
5.1 The Government’s Initial Response: 2001	17
5.2 The International Science Community’s Response: 2001	18
5.3 The Public Response: 2001 - 2008	18
5.4 The Government’s Response Seven Years On: 2008	19
<b>6. The Current Landscape: 2008</b>	<b>21</b>
6.1 Genetic Modification Experiments	21
6.2 Legislation	31
6.3 Institutions	33
6.4 Strategies	40
6.5 International Agreements	41
6.6 Economic Analysis	42
6.7 Research on Ethics and Public Attitudes	43
<b>7. Conclusion</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>79</b>

## Tables

Table 1	List of the Ten Watershed Recommendations	14
Table 2	List of the Three Institutional Recommendations	16
Table 3	The Types of GMO Applications	21
Table 4	ERMA Decisions: Indoor GMO Approvals by Financial Year	23
Table 5	IBSC Decisions: Indoor GMO Approvals by Financial Year	24
Table 6	ERMA Decisions: Outdoor GMO Approvals by Calendar Year	25
Table 7	ERMA Decisions: Active Outdoor GMO Approvals by Description	26
Table 8	ERMA Crown Funding, Expenditure and Application Fees	35

## Figures

Figure 1	The Four Commissioners	11
Figure 2	The Strategic Spectrum Identified by the Commissioners	12

## Appendices

Appendix 1	The Warrant	51
Appendix 2	Timeline of Significant Events and Reports	54
Appendix 3	Summary of Changes to the HSNO Act	59
Appendix 4	The Royal Commission Public Engagement Process	63
Appendix 5	New Zealand Society for Risk Management	65
Appendix 6	Applications for Outdoor Experiments in Date Order: 1997 – Today	67
Appendix 7	Proposals for Amendments under Section 67A	70
Appendix 8	Outdoor Experiment Status by Entity: 1997 – 2007	72
Appendix 9	Research on Public Attitudes	76

2001

## 5.2 The International Science

A detailed review of the international science in this paper, but we felt an editorial in *Nature* the challenges ahead:

Having established a model of communication nations may consider emulating, the New Zealand laurels. Some of the Commission's recommendations. It is all too easy to request more funds for research, but the Commission is surely right to highlight the need for publicly funded exploration of the environmental impact of GM crops as well as research into organic and other sustainable agricultural systems. But the report's recommendations are much more wide ranging and, in places, contentious. To consolidate the Commission's good work, the New Zealand government will need to legislate with determination. ('A sound approach to GM debate', 2001: 569)

## 5.3 The Public Response: 2001 - 2008

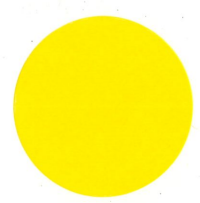
A detailed review of the public response to the Royal Commission is outside the scope of this paper, however those interested in gaining an insight into the national and international response may like to access the archives on the Sustainable Future website (for example, see McGuinness, 2001a; 2001b). We have also attached an August 2001 press release by the New Zealand Society for Risk Management (2001) in Appendix 5. Over this time there have been a number of public responses which are described below.

### 5.3.1 Public marches

There were numerous marches in response to the findings of the Royal Commission and the government's response. Two of the more significant were the 'GE-free hikoi', both of which traveled from Northland to Wellington.

The first began in October 2001, with over two hundred people arriving at Parliament on 1 November (Bennett, 2001). This was specifically in response to the GM tamarillo field tests by HortResearch in Kerikeri, and the lifting of the voluntary moratorium on GM applications which was officially announced the day before the group's arrival in Wellington. The group also called for the resignation of Māori MPs, saying that they had failed to stop the government allowing GM field tests. This march was accompanied by a 'sit in' at ERMA's offices in Wellington on 1 November 2001, in which 15 Māori protesters from the Tino Rangatiratanga movement refused to leave for half an hour (Bradford, 2001; Frizzel, 2001). In addition, in late August 2001 the Auckland GE-Free Coalition organised a rally up Queen Street in which 10,000 protesters participated. The intention of the march was to generate anti-GM pressure at a time when the government was making decisions about its response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission (Green Party, 2001).

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The second GE-free hikoi began on 22 August 2003 and ended with hundreds of protesters gathering at Parliament on 23 October (RSNZ, 2003). This hikoi called for a complete ban on GM in New Zealand, and was in response to the planned lifting of the moratorium on the release of genetically modified crops which coincided with the group's arrival in Wellington. The hikoi named itself the 'Seed Carriers', and the participants collected seeds as they traveled the length of the North Island in protest at the harm GM could cause to New Zealand's seed varieties, including native plants (Fitzsimons, 2003); these were presented to the government on their arrival in Wellington. Both GE-free hikoi were predominantly organised and participated in by Māori, but many New Zealand Europeans and other ethnic groups also took part.

### 5.3.2 GE-free zones

Discussion in many communities and regions focused on the creation of GE-free zones as a local way to manage this risk (see RCGM, 2001b:49). Many regional and district councils considered such a move, and some made this decision to become GE-free (for example, Northland District Council<sup>20</sup>). A GE-Free Register was created, which now lists 5693 properties covering a total of 360064 acres.<sup>21</sup>

### 5.3.3 Wilful Damage

Over the last seven years, a few members of the public have resorted to intentionally damaging GM crops and other field uses. A recent example is the chopping down of trees at Scion ('GE protesters chop down trees at research institute', 2008).

## 5.4 The Government's Response Seven Years On: 2008

In the years following the Commissioners' report, there has not been a thorough government review of action undertaken to improve New Zealand's national framework for the management of genetic modification. With this in mind, Sustainable Future has undertaken an independent assessment of the implementation of the Commissioners' recommendations, titled *Review of the Forty-Nine Recommendations of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification* (Sustainable Future, 2008).<sup>22</sup> This reviews the government's response to each of the recommendations and draws conclusions on the outstanding issues. The paper found:

- Of the package of forty-nine recommendations only twenty were fully implemented.
- Of the ten watershed recommendations only two were fully implemented.

<sup>20</sup> GE-Free Northland has been an active promoter of GE-free zones. See <http://www.gefreenorthland.org.nz/>.

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved on 5 February 2008 from the GE-Free Register, see <http://www.gefreeregister.org.nz>.

<sup>22</sup> Available from <http://www.sustainablefuture.info>.