

THINGS ABOUT GM

3.

The GM rules are designed to allow New Zealanders to enjoy the opportunities of organic and conventional agriculture, while at the same time not closing the door to the contribution that GM may make to our way of life (especially medicinal and therapeutic).

4.

GM is used in New Zealand for research and education, with much of the research being medical (eg, investigating treatments for multiple sclerosis or cystic fibrosis).

5.

Any food that is genetically modified or contains genetically modified material must be approved as safe by Foods Standards Australia New Zealand and must be clearly labelled.

Want to know more?

The following websites will tell you more about genetic modification in New Zealand.

www.gm.govt.nz for information about genetic modification in New Zealand — how it is used and how it is controlled.

www.mfe.govt.nz/issues/organisms for more information on the Government’s policy on genetic modification and its response to the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification.

www.ermanz.govt.nz for information about how ERMA makes decisions on GM applications, and how to make a submission to ERMA.

www.morst.govt.nz for information on the Government’s Biotechnology Strategy.

www.bioethics.govt.nz for information on Toi te Taiao: the Bioethics Council.

www.nzfsa.govt.nz/consumers/food-safety/gm for GM food safety facts.

Or contact the Ministry for the Environment for printed information by phoning (04) 917 7493 or emailing publications@mfe.govt.nz

For a copy of the full report of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification go to www.gmcommission.govt.nz or contact a bookshop that sells government publications.

www.gm.govt.nz

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GENETIC MODIFICATION - THE NEW ZEALAND APPROACH



www.gm.govt.nz

5 IMPORTANT

1.

Genetic modification (GM) involves moving or deleting genes (the part of the cell that determines individual characteristics) within or between species.

2.

GM in New Zealand is strictly controlled through the Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA). ERMA operates under strict laws, in line with the Government’s cautious approach to GM. It considers each application on its merits and can approve an application only if benefits outweigh risks.

MANAGING GENETIC MODIFICATION

www.gm.govt.nz



PROCEEDING CAUTIOUSLY

In July 2001, the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification reported its findings after a 14-month inquiry into the risks and benefits of genetic modification.

It heard from over 400 experts, including scientists, environmentalists and ethical specialists. It considered more than 10,000 public submissions and heard the views of many others during a series of public meetings, hui and workshops around New Zealand.

The Royal Commission concluded that New Zealand should proceed cautiously with genetic modification (GM), but not close the door to the opportunities offered by the new technology. It made 49 recommendations for managing GM safely.

The Government decided to put in place a two-year freeze (moratorium) on applications to release genetically modified organisms into the environment. This was to allow time for the Royal Commission's recommendations to be implemented. Parliament passed law for the moratorium to expire automatically on 29 October 2003.

HOW GM IS MANAGED

While the moratorium was in place, the Government amended the main legislation covering GM – the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act 1996.

The Government gave the Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) new powers to set controls on the release of GM organisms. Controls could include:

- special security fencing for animals
- allowing release of only male animals (to prevent breeding)
- ensuring GM plants are removed from the ground before they flower, that their flowers are removed, or that they flower at a time different from non-GM plants of the same species (to prevent cross-pollination)
- ensuring that GM plants are grown a certain distance away from non-GM plants of the same species to prevent cross-pollination.

In addition, the enforcement system was strengthened, with stiff penalties, to ensure ERMA's conditions are followed.

The Government increased ERMA's budget to develop more methods for estimating the potential economic impact of releasing genetically modified organisms into the environment. ERMA must decline an application if the economic risks are too great. The Government also funded more than \$7 million of research into the environmental, human health, economic, social and cultural impacts of GM organisms. The results of this research will form the basis for ERMA's decisions.

Currently in New Zealand:

- no GM crops are grown commercially
- no GM fruit, vegetables or meat are sold
- processed food can contain GM ingredients but must be clearly labelled.

HOW THE APPLICATION PROCESS WORKS

Following the expiry of the moratorium on 29 October 2003, ERMA can once again consider applications to release GM organisms on a case-by-case basis. No GM organisms can be released without an approval from ERMA.

When considering applications, ERMA operates under strict rules laid down by law. It must consider all the impacts the GM organisms will have on the environment, public health, society and the economy. It must also take cultural, spiritual and ethical considerations into account.

ERMA must notify the public when it receives an application to release GM organisms, and accept submissions from anyone who wants to have a say in the application. People with a particular interest can register with ERMA so they are automatically informed when ERMA receives applications.

ERMA can only approve an application when:

- (a) it has complete information about the environmental, public health, economic and social impacts of the GM organism; and
- (b) release of the GM organism meets strict environmental and public health standards set out in law; and
- (c) the benefits of the application outweigh the risks.

ERMA's decision to approve or decline an application can be appealed to the High Court. If the application does go ahead, conditions are monitored, enforced and amended as necessary by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and ERMA.

GM and Food

Before any GM food can be sold in New Zealand, it must undergo rigorous health testing, and be approved as safe for people to eat by Food Standards Australia New Zealand. GM food must be labelled so consumers can choose whether or not to buy it.

The Application Process

Application lodged with ERMA. The applicant must provide ERMA with all information about all the effects the organism will have.



ERMA notifies the public that it has received the application and calls for submissions.



ERMA receives public submissions on the application and conducts hearings.



ERMA considers all information and makes a decision to approve or decline the application.



ERMA publicly notifies its decision.



ERMA's decision can be appealed to the High Court on points of law and the procedure ERMA followed to come to its decision.



If the application proceeds, conditions are monitored, enforced and amended as necessary.