

Submission to OGTR on the Review of the Gene Technology Regulations

from Dr Josef Zybert on 2016-11-15

The object of the GT Act is:

“to protect the health and safety of people, and to protect the environment, by identifying risks posed by or as a result of gene technology, and by managing those risks through regulating certain dealings with GMOs.”

There is a saying that those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it.

Many relevant examples from history can be applied to Gene Technology, for example, Marie Curie. Marie Curie discovered the radioactive substances Radium and Polonium, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics and the Nobel Prize in Chemistry and she died on 4 July 1934 in France due to aplastic anaemia brought on by exposure to nuclear radiation.

Marie Curie contributed enormously to Science. But unfortunately it was at the expense of her own life, because her knowledge was incomplete.

If there had been an Office of the Radiation Technology Regulator and had Marie Curie, a leading nuclear Scientist of the time, been asked to advise on the proposal to add a microgram of Radium per litre to the milk of babies Marie Curie might well have advised to do so based on her knowledge at the time - knowledge which was incomplete, and being incomplete she could not have imagined, and she was totally oblivious to the fact, that death would be the consequence.

So too with Gene Technology.

Moreover there is no social imperative to put at risk the health and safety of people. Our community is not starving. We have abundant clean green safe food. The only imperative seems to be a commercial imperative for the benefit of certain commercial entities. And where this commercial imperative has a potential to contradict the GT Act in breach of the object to protect the health and safety of people, the latter must prevail.

Marie Curie contributed much to Science and her work provided the foundation for more research which led to many great benefits for mankind, safe and useful benefits. So too will Gene Technology, if the guiding principle to protect the health and safety of people supersedes hasty commercialisation for the commercial gain of a few corporations.

The substances that Marie Curie worked with killed her, and if certain hasty actions had been taken then millions more could have been killed. And just as the NASA disaster delayed space exploration so too work in nuclear Physics could have been delayed, but, the science she discovered continued and led to further developments which soon will culminate in unlimited safe clean virtually free energy - nuclear fusion. GT will also lead to an abundance of food. GT in its broader potential will produce micro-organisms to metabolize crude oil into safe waste in spills, and to metabolize atmospheric CO₂ into useful products and even enable immensely powerful organic computers and other benefits we are yet to imagine, IF, the commercialisation proceeds safely and maturely to benefit lives of people not profits of corporations, and with no community backlash.