

Submission to the Federal Government on Gene Technology Regulation and Release -Susan Ainge
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My name is Susan Ainge. I am a grazier from western NSW with other pastoral holdings in the Upper Hunter and Tablelands regions. I have represented farmers at both State and Federal level on issues relating to business, tax, economics and trade as well as quarantine, climate change and gene technology over the last twenty years. I have also presented workshops on sustaining agricultural production through climate change under the auspices of the Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, throughout NSW especially targeting women and culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant groups.

My submission to you is to support continued Regulation and Monitoring of any Genetically Altered Plant, Material or Animal in Australia. It is my belief that though I believe this technology may contribute to our future technology pool in a constructive way that we would be negligent as a nation to allow its release unfettered into our unique environment. My reasons for this caution are to prevent unplanned contamination, to maintain the current diversity of our animal and plant gene pool, reduce the development of resistance to drugs and chemicals and to maintain individual choice.

As we have witnessed innovative scientists are inventing new techniques such as RNA, CRISPR and gene drives and others, which all in some way alter the genes and if not the gene configuration. This is obviously done to produce some conceived advantage, though they will claim that the underlying plant or organism is unaltered. If this were the case, why would it be necessary to patent either the technology or the materials, organism or plants that are the result.

It is not safe, fair, nor scientifically prudent to release these altered products of new gene manipulating technology without the same regulation, segregation and monitoring that we accord all other new technology. This is specially pertinent when we are dealing with some organism or plant which can interbreed or cross with similar species if released unfettered. To clearly and scientifically monitor a release, a new technology should be segregated and retained isolated through several breeding cycles to ascertain its ability to retain its conceived "bred" advantage in the wider environment and to ascertain any further positive or negative traits. Only by monitoring against a control are we truly assessing the value of new innovation whilst maintaining the safety of the environment and outcome.

Financial prudence would support monitoring, segregation and regulation of gene technology. While technology companies endeavour to patent the perceived advantages of innovation, the disadvantages, contamination and resistance that have been attributed to unregulated introduction of this technology has come at a cost which has not been accounted for under any liability scheme or bond. Loss of export market share due to contamination, and herbicide resistant weeds being only two examples of the result. These results are quantifiable and should be retrievable from other than the public purse.

Proposals by the Australian Department of health to alter the Australian Gene Technology Act without including these new technologies (RNA, CRISPR, Gene drives and the like) under the Gene Technology description I understand may have the unforeseen result of allowing these technologies to produce plants and organisms that are released into the environment without regulation, segregation and no label or liability scheme in place to cover negative consequences. It is my belief that this would be wrong and clearly jeopardise our trade, future health and environment. These controls or regulation, segregation and monitoring backed by clear labelling enhance our choice and opportunities.