



MEDIA BRIEFING PACK

Keeping New Zealand GE-Free

The story, the stakes, and the questions worth asking about New Zealand's plan to deregulate genetic engineering.

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Who we are

GE Honesty Foundation Limited is an organisation of scientists, farmers, consumers, and business and health professionals. It was incorporated in January 2025 after investigating the commercial, scientific, environmental, and animal- and human-health risks of the Government's proposed changes to New Zealand's gene-technology rules.

What we stand for

We support the traditional breeding practices that have improved crops and animals over generations. We oppose releasing man-made GE and GM organisms into New Zealand's environment, where their effects can't be contained or undone.

97%

of public submissions opposed the Bill — a result the Government has not acted on.

30,000+

followers across our social platforms

1M+

views of our social content

There's a lot here to get your teeth into

1

An economic gamble

Independent modelling puts \$10–\$20 billion a year of primary exports at risk — against a clean, GE-free brand our trade is built on.

2

A coalition split

The bill is stalled. NZ First is acting as the handbrake, calling it “too liberal” — a live fault line inside the government.

3

An evidence gap

No published cost-benefit analysis supports lowering the standards. Select-committee minority views flag the same hole.

4

A public kept out

15,000 submissions, 97% opposed - these were ignored and the bill progressed *unchanged*

The numbers behind the headline

97%

of public submissions opposed the Bill — and it went ahead unchanged.

\$20b

potential risk to NZ's GDP, reported by the NZ Institute of Economic Research (NZIER).

0

published Regulatory Impact Statements weighing the economic and regulatory costs.

30+

countries currently ban or restrict GE crops - after 50+ years of the technology.

What is actually being proposed

New Zealand's current GMO legislation provides strong safeguards against environmental harm. The proposed changes would significantly relax those protections and open the door to environmental release of GMOs. While described as lifting a "30-year ban", the reality is a major shift away from New Zealand's precautionary approach, with fewer safeguards to protect native flora and fauna. Despite being described as "aligned with Australia", the proposed system removes two key Australian safeguards: an independent regulator and a standing ethics committee.

In plain terms

The three bills together move New Zealand from one of the world's most cautious GE regimes toward one of the most permissive.

Gene Technology Bill

Sets up a new regulator and allows gene tech outside the lab for the first time in decades.

HSNO Act amendment

Removes the current requirement to regulate new GMOs — the change to watch most closely.

ACVM Act amendment

Eases rules for gene-tech inputs in agriculture and veterinary use.



The economics don't add up

\$10–\$20b

a year in primary exports estimated to be at risk if GE is released into the environment - the clean, GE-free brand our biggest earners trade on.

Premium at stake

Dairy, meat, wine, honey and horticulture sell on a natural, GE-free story.

Border risk

Accidental GMO contamination could see shipments rejected by key markets.

No upside case

Promised benefits haven't materialised here or overseas — with no cost-benefit analysis to weigh against the risk.

The market is moving the other way

US\$2.6t

the forecast size of the global non-GMO food market by 2034 — demand is moving toward GE-free food, not away from it (Fortune Business Insights).

A competitive edge

Our GE-free status is a premium our biggest export markets are willing to pay for — the reform trades it away.

\$400m+ the other way

Public money is committed to AgriZeroNZ and methane-tech programmes built on synthetic biology still unproven at commercial scale.

Backing the wrong horse

We'd spend to import GE risk while the market rewards exactly the clean-green story we already own.

Big change, thin evidence

No cost-benefit analysis

No published economic case supports lowering the current standards — flagged in select-committee minority views.

Limited consultation

The public wasn't consulted while the bill was drafted; submissions came only after it was written.

Precaution dropped

Critics say the reform shifts away from the precautionary approach and offers weak co-existence protection for GE-free producers.

Benefits unproven

Limited examples of successful GE crops exist — GMO corn, soy, cotton and canola have been shown to degrade soil, reduce yield and increase chemical use.



What the Bill removes

- **No safety net**

Removes existing requirements for precaution, safety assessment, registration and legal liability.

- **Labelling not required**

All transparency around GE in food is removed — consumers won't know what they're eating.

- **Mandatory medical fast-track**

Medicines approved by overseas gene-tech regulators gain automatic access — New Zealand loses its own say.

- **No responsibility**

Gene-edited organisms could be released without notification — leaving councils, ratepayers and farmers to carry the cost.

- **Compliance costs shift**

Unfair expense burdens fall on non-GMO producers and exporters, not on the developers of the technology.

- **Tikanga and Māori rights**

Concerns over kaitiakitanga and mana motuhake were raised heavily in submissions, and largely disregarded.

Contamination can't be recalled

The core environmental concern is **irreversibility**. Once GE organisms are released, gene flow into ecosystems, local crops and traditional plants (taonga) cannot simply be undone — and producers will lose the ability to credibly claim GE-free. New Zealand already knows the cost of introducing organisms that become difficult to control: introduced pests such as rabbits, possums, stoats and weasels cause hundreds of millions of dollars in losses to farmers each year. The lesson from biosecurity is simple: **prevention is far cheaper than trying to control an established problem**. Opening the environment to potentially irreversible genetic changes means accepting risks that, if they materialise, will leave farmers, communities and taxpayers paying the bill for generations.

- Native taonga species
- Local & organic crops
- Rongoā / traditional plants
- Pollinators — e.g. reduced bee survival near GM corn
- The GE-free claim itself

Why “irreversible” matters

A rejected export shipment can be replaced. A contaminated ecosystem cannot. That asymmetry — unlimited downside, no proven upside — is the heart of the precautionary case, and the reason a growing number of farmers now oppose the change.

Because GMOs self-replicate, once released they cannot be recalled — large-scale monoculture also narrows genetic diversity, increasing vulnerability to pests, disease and climate change.

“Precision” does not mean “safe”

“

Newer methods like gene editing are described as more precise — but precision doesn't equate with less risk. They still introduce foreign genetic material and still carry the risk of unintended, off-target changes. Small changes in genes can be just as devastating as large ones — which makes rigorous testing more essential, not less.

Prof. David S. Williams, PhD

Professor of Ophthalmology & Neurobiology, UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine

Established fact

Off-target changes from CRISPR-based editing are documented in leading journals.

The gap in the Bill

Some edited organisms would be exempt — released with no required screening for those effects.

A court just struck this playbook down

On 4 June 2026, the High Court of England and Wales found the UK government failed to properly assess its gene-editing deregulation before removing safeguards on transparency, traceability and labelling.

1

Advisors got it wrong

The court found the Minister was wrongly advised about his own legal powers and pressed ahead on that basis.

2

Ruled unlawful

Deciding on incorrect advice, without assessing the consequences, was held to be irrational and unlawful.

3

A warning for NZ

New Zealand is being asked to travel the same road — with the same questions about how well Ministers are being advised.

This isn't left versus right, it's a fight on two fronts

The Bill is stalled ahead of the November election. Without NZ First, National doesn't have the votes to pass it, but the parties blocking it don't agree with each other either.

NZ First

HANDBRAKE

Won't back the Bill without major changes; calls it "too liberal" and beyond key trading partners.

Labour

OPPOSED

Won't support the current form; cites unresolved trade, liability and consultation questions.

Greens

OPPOSED

Call it radical deregulation with weak protections and no economic analysis.

Te Pāti Māori

OPPOSED

Remains against the Bill; concerns over tikanga and the Māori advisory role.

Headlines worth running with

“The Real Cost of Gene Editing: A \$20 Billion Annual Loss to NZ GDP”

“97% of Kiwis Say No to GMOs. Government Ignores Them”

“Hit and Run? No Consequences for International Companies Trialling Gene Tech in NZ”

“‘Clean and Green’ No More”

“NZ's Unique Flora and Fauna at Risk of Permanent Contamination”

“Economic Threats to Farmers and Exporters That Most Don't Know Is Happening”

Four questions worth putting to proponents

Q1 What's the rush - why lower the standards now without a published cost-benefit case?

Q2 Who actually benefits? The promised gains haven't materialised here or overseas.

Q3 Where are the GE success stories that justify the risk to a \$10–\$20b export brand?

Q4 Who carries the cost if contamination happens - and how would it ever be undone?

WHO'S RAISING CONCERNS

This isn't a fringe worry

Exporters

Fonterra and DairyNZ have flagged export and contamination risk.

Farmers

A growing number oppose the change as awareness spreads.

Organics & wine

OANZ, organic growers and clean-brand wine regions.

Iwi & Māori

Kaitiakitanga and mana motuhake concerns; heavy submission engagement.

Conservation

Forest & Bird, EDS and Greenpeace New Zealand.

Consumers

Concerns about contamination and the right to choose GE-free food.

MEDIA & CAMPAIGN INQUIRIES

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