

## How our municipality can be a GM-free Zone

Council can take many effective actions to keep our region GM-free, for good economic, health, environmental and social reasons. Many of the following proposals are modelled on the highly successful nuclear free zones campaign of the 1980s so they certainly are effective.

**Our Council can and should, at least, pass and implement the following GM-free resolutions:**

### 1. Declare the shire a GM-free zone:

- a. **Amend the council's food service contracts**, to require GM-free foods for all council food services. It is a simple, quick and cost-neutral action to take. The health of the people for whom local government has responsibility needs protecting, both now and in the future. Many councils require their food services, crèches, hospitals, meals on wheels, catering, etc. to be GM-free, based on the precautionary principle (i.e. better safe than sorry). All it takes is a change in the contract as food processors are required by FSANZ to know if their foods are GM or not, even though the processors don't have to label them.
- b. **Erect GM-free Zone signage** in and around the municipality to reflect the mood of local people and promote awareness that GM crops and foods pose various threats. Nuclear-free zone signs posted in many council areas in the 1980s had very positive effects on state and federal government policy on nuclear proliferation. See: [www.geneethics.org](http://www.geneethics.org).

An indication of the significance of GM-free is that South Australia has extended its GM ban and passed a new quarantine law to prohibit the passage of any GM canola into or across its territory. GM canola threatens SA's GM-free markets here and overseas.

- c. **Publish a GM-free Zone Declaration** that could be signed by all sympathetic ratepayers and published in local media, on the council website and on notice boards. It would have positive effects similar to the nuclear free zone declarations of the 1980s. Local businesses and organisations would also support the GM-free Zone Declaration. For instance, in 2003 the Bega Shire Council became GM-free with the support of its Chamber of Commerce and the shire's major industry leader, Bega Cheese.
- d. **Establish a local register** to record and map the location of any GM sites that may eventually come into the area, when and if this becomes necessary. A similar register could be established for those who choose to declare themselves GM-free. Also, call on the state government to establish an online register (including maps), with the locations of GM canola sites - both experimental and commercial - so GM-free producers (farmers, beekeepers, etc) can avoid those areas.

The likely impacts of GM canola are conveyed in motions passed by the NSW Apiarists 2008 State Conference, on Friday, 23 May 2008. Their resolutions were:

18. That the NSWAA be able to obtain and notify its members through the Australian Honeybee News, the locations of GM Canola crops so that the members can avoid working GM Canola if they wish.

19. That the NSWAA inform the Government that it's members will seek compensation in the event of lost honey sales and markets and bad publicity from the release of GM Canola.

20. That NSWAA request from AHBIC and FCAAA to inform the Association if there has been any discussion on the impact of the GM seed release in Australia within any Australian Government bodies. If so – What was the outcome? If not – What

procedure can be put in place to protect our industry? Can the report be advised to Australian State conferences?

21. That the State Association ask RIRDC to source information from overseas on the after effects on bees that have been working GM Canola and others.

22. That the NSWAA express its utmost dissatisfaction with both State and federal Government for the lack of consultation with the bee industry over the releasing of GMs into agriculture, particularly with the ramifications for the honey and pollination industry.

## **2. Write to State Premier and Agriculture Minister to ask the state government to:**

- a. **Extend the ban** on commercial GM canola for at least another five years;
- b. **Declare our municipality a GM-free Zone** by using the powers it has to create GM and GM-free areas (these state powers derive from a policy made under Section 21 of the Commonwealth Gene Technology Act 2000). State and Territory governments used these powers in 2003 to set up GM-free zones throughout the state to protect overseas food markets. States and territories (except Queensland and Northern Territory) all passed laws to ban commercial GM crops.

Declaring our local government area GM-free and asking the state to legalise it sends a strong message to State and Commonwealth Governments that there is community and official support for GM-free policies.

Declaring our shire or municipality a GM-free Zone is easy and legal. The declaration underlies a positive production and marketing strategy that makes economic and environmental sense, protects the livelihood of farming communities and sends out a public message of care for community health and the environment.

## **3. Write to Commonwealth and State Health and Agriculture Ministers, asking for:**

- a. **Strict liability laws** to hold GM companies fully accountable for any GM impacts, including genetic contamination. The alternative is farmers suing farmers for contamination when everyone knows it is inevitable with canola pollen and seed.

Councils will also need this protection when GM canola outcrosses to weeds and increases the cost of weed management to the council and other land managers. Canola seed can stay in the soil for at least 10 years before re-germinating (see Office of Gene Technology paper – The biology and ecology of canola) and its pollen can go up to 26 kms. Canola has weedy brassica relatives in the environment – wild radish, turnip, mustard and charlock – with which it can exchange genes. These weeds will soon tolerate being sprayed with Roundup, escalating the costs and hazards of alternative weed management strategies, in towns, cities and the country-side.

- b. **All foods and animal feed made using GM technology to be fully labeled.** Shoppers and farmers have the right to know the source of food and feed products and unlabeled GM products take this right away.

GM canola harvested for animal feed during drought may contain some seed. Carting it through the countryside will lead to seed being spilt and germinating in any disturbed environment – roadsides, parks, farmers fields and rail sidings. GM feed must be labeled to assist those areas that want to remain GM-free to do so.

**Bob Phelps, Gene Ethics: 1300 133 868 [info@geneethics.org](mailto:info@geneethics.org) [www.geneethics.org](http://www.geneethics.org)**