

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of Proposed Plan Change 18 of the Far North District
Plan

AND

IN THE MATTER of Proposed Plan Change 131 of the Whangarei District
Plan

**JOINT HEARING OF SUBMISSIONS BY COMMISSIONERS OF THE FAR
NORTH AND WHANGAREI DISTRICT COUNCILS**

**EVIDENCE OF MARTY ROBINSON
ON BEHALF OF
SOIL & HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND INCORPORATED AND
14 OTHER SUBMITTERS**

DATED: 30 May 2016

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

In summary, my evidence:

- States my background and expertise
- Raises concerns about the effects of GMO contamination
- Supports a precautionary approach to GMOs/GE in the proposed district plans.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

1. My name is Marty Robinson and I hold the position of Owner / Manager of Kerikeri Organic.
2. I hold a Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture Certificate in Horticultural Management.
3. I have been involved in the Organic industry since before 1995 and have owned and managed an active organic establishment from that year, growing and retailing a wide range of organic produce.
4. I have been involved with the GMO issue since (around) 1997. I spoke to the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification and am the Far North District Council representative to the Northland/Auckland Inter-Council Working Party on GMOs Risk Evaluation & Management Options.
5. My organic operation relies on a pesticide-free, and GMO-free environment

OUTLINE OF ENTERPRISE

6. Kerikeri Organic is a growing operation on a 30 hectare property with a retail outlet on the property. The farm has a wide range of activities – farm forestry, cattle, fruit trees, garden, a community garden and home garden, and regenerating native bush. We grow a range of fruit and vegetables and supplement the range by purchasing wholesale quantities of organic fruit and vegetables, as well as dried goods, which we sell from the farm shop.
7. Although not certified organic, we produce to the organic standards and have applied bio-dynamic practices since prior to 1995
8. We have a regular number of locals visit the shop and also pack for delivery to customers from Mangonui to Auckland.

9. We sell at three markets in the Bay of Islands throughout the week.
10. Our customers are sometimes life-dependent on nutrient-rich, pesticide-free produce and young mothers, determined to give their children the best start in life, make up a percentage of our customer base.
11. Although the shop income was seriously affected by the Financial Collapse in 2008, resulting in many families supplementing their diminished income by growing their own vegetables, we have noticed a significant resurgence of interest in our shop over the past year.
12. We rely on our neighbours properly managing their farming enterprises so that there is no contamination of our growing area with prohibited substances – such as herbicides or pesticides. This would also be so for GMOs, if they were to be allowed into the environment, as they are prohibited in the organic standards.
13. There is no tolerance for any contamination of our produce with prohibited substances in the organic standards and we are absolutely committed to supplying healthy pesticide-free and GE free food to our customers.

REGULATION

14. Organic standards require that there is no tolerance for GM contaminated produce. If we experienced GMO contamination, such as pollen drift or invasion of pesticide resistant plants, we could no longer market our produce as organic. Since we are a relatively small producer, the enterprise would no longer be economically viable. We are totally dependent on our direct sales based on our organic reputation.

EFFECT OF GMO CONTAMINATION

15. Our present environment is GMO free. As has been shown by recent escapes of noxious weeds in the South Island, if GMOs were allowed into the environment, as with the spread of Varroa mite from one end of the country to the other, it would not take long before we could no longer say that our food is free of GMOs even if we went to the added expense of testing every product on a regular basis. Wind, runoff of rain, birds and insects, machinery moving from property to property, clothing, are all vectors for moving seeds or contaminated material from property to property with the end result that we would have pollution of the food chain from herbicide or pesticide resistant GM crops. One of the most used

GM method overseas is Roundup Ready. Roundup, or glyphosate, is known to be carcinogenic and is inherent inside the crop of choice – corn, maize, cotton, soy, and canola. As stated earlier we have customers who are life-dependent on pesticide free produce.

16. We could not in good conscience grow or supply any GM produce due to the fact that the techniques used, no matter how sophisticated the method may be, nor how scientific the endorsements they are given, give no guarantee as to their safety.
17. We have a significant number of road-side sales to tourists, who make up a percentage of our customers. If GMOs are allowed into the region I would foresee a negative impact on our tourism industry with some travellers preferring to travel to GM free Regions and countries.
18. We cater for the discerning customer who value the quality of the food they eat. This includes families on low incomes who are determined to feed their children well and who sacrifice their personal comfort knowing that we should eat healthy, wholesome food.

PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH

19. The Precautionary Principle should be applied to maintain the status quo, a GMO free environment. For the above reasons, I strongly support application of the precautionary approach in the Whangarei and Far North District Plans, clearly stating that GM free is the default position, under the Objectives, Policies and Rules.
20. It should not be up to GM free producers, whether conventional, biological or organic, to protect themselves from the effects from a possible release of a GMO into the environment. Indeed, I cannot see any way that we could protect our enterprise from the escape of GMOs once they have been released into the environment.
21. I note and support, that in the case of outdoor trials, should such be approved, there will be a condition requiring a bond to cover remediation and the cost of damage to other growers.

22. In the future it should be for GM proponents to prove via a Plan Change on a case-by-case basis that the GMO of their choice is not only beneficial to the consumer but that it is not detrimental to other producers, consumers or the environment.

CONCLUSION

23. Our business and our customers, and in fact the whole of the New Zealand's economy, depends on our reputation for healthy food as well as a clean, green, natural environment. GMOs at their very best using novel techniques, are an inherently risky approach to plant breeding. There is no proof of safety and there are notable examples of the technology having serious negative results – death in the case of GM tryptophan, deformed animals in the case of GM cows in Ruakura. There is no certainty that insertion of the desired trait in the genome is accurate and does not have negative side-effects, nor certainty of outcome over time.

24. Until there is certainty of the long-term benefits of any new technique and no inherent risks to either the economy or the environment then we must adhere to the Precautionary Principle and keep the environment GM free.

25. It may be that there may be benefits in the future from the use of GMOs in the wider environment, but until then there must be an acknowledgement that the status quo is GM free, and rules, policies and objectives should be included in District and Regional Plans prohibiting the use of GMOs in the environment.

Thanks for the opportunity to present.

Marty Robinson