

Welcoming the GE-Free Hikoi to parliament

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Tags: Genetic Engineering, Maori issues

First, I welcome this opportunity to acknowledge and tautoko the hikoi that has arrived at Parliament this afternoon, having walked and travelled all the way from the far north.

The hikoi started off early in October to make its protest against field trials and the possible commercial release of genetically modified organisms into the natural environment of this country.

I met with the people from the hikoi last night, and today, and recognise their courage and determination in taking that long journey.

I know it has not been easy for them, and as someone who has survived a hikoi myself, the March Against Unemployment that went from Te Hapua to Poneke in 1988, I am well aware of the difficulties of the long march and the tensions that arise, but to a good purpose.

It was very fitting that the hikoi started in Northland, an area of this country that is absolutely passionate about its natural environment. We have some of the most beautiful beaches, islands, seas, rivers and forests of this country.

We are passionate, not just that we have all this, but that we want to keep it that way. The beauty of the far north is a microcosm of Aotearoa and there is no place for genetic engineering in our home.

Just recently we had the case of the genetically modified tamarillo field trials carried out by HortResearch in KeriKeri.

There is a proposal at the moment that chloropicrin may be applied under plastic to stop problems arising from the fact that genetically modified crops have been grown at Kerikeri.

We do not know what will come from this, but we are now assured that HortResearch will do everything that they can do to mitigate the risk from those crops. We do not want to see any more field trials in the north or anywhere else in this country.

Many indigenous people in this country, as in other parts of the world, are deeply uncomfortable with the prospect of genetically engineered contamination of the natural world.

I commend those members of the Government's Maori caucus who have had the courage to at least try to change the direction that their leaders have, unfortunately, taken.

There is a tremendous groundswell around the country that has been growing over the past few years against the mixing of plant and animal genes with human DNA. It is not only Maori who find that the mixing of human and animal whakapapa is 'bizarre and offensive'.

Transgenic experimentation goes against some of the most basic instincts that have been our legacy for endless generations of life on earth.

I believe that to deliberately contaminate our whakapapa is spiritually, ethically, culturally, and biologically abhorrent to the majority of people in this country, whatever background we come from.

We want to keep the whole of Aotearoa 'GE free'.

The people in the district that I come from, would like to see Rodney become 'GE free' as soon as possible.

We have a choice in this country about which way to go. To become a genetically engineered biotech wonderland is not economically or scientifically the best way forward.

The 'GE free' register is growing daily. Many people are signing up and saying that the only buffer zones they want in Aotearoa are the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

For Maori and tauiwi alike, deep concerns are being ignored by this week's Government decision. I would like to make it very clear that the package that the Government announced yesterday in response to the royal commission report is not

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Green Party policy.

We have not in any way signed up to it. As far as I am aware, we remain the only party in this Parliament committed to keeping genetically modified organisms out of the water, the air, and the earth of Aotearoa.

This is just the beginning of the struggle. We are sorry that it will have to continue and that a lot more work will have to be done before we get the country we want.

I tautoko all those who are taking part in this struggle. The debate about genetically modified organisms is not about different world views, but about the one environment that we all share.

Location

General Debate Speech in Parliament

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