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New Zealand likely to drift into a GM future

The Government could be doing more to strategically manage genetic modification in New Zealand, according to research released today by Sustainable Future.

Seven years on from the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification, the research highlights that less than half of the 49 recommendations in the Commissioners' report have been fully implemented.

Sustainable Future's chief executive, Wendy McGuinness, says there are very few decisions that a Government can make that it cannot undo – but releasing Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) into the environment is one of them.

"We take away the rights of future generations to be a GM-free food producer by releasing GMOs into the environment, so it is not a decision that should be made lightly," she says.

The *Review of the Forty-Nine Recommendations of the Royal Commission* suggests that it is timely for New Zealand to revisit its strategic options on genetic modification so that the Government can make robust decisions about GM field tests and releases.

Mrs McGuinness says that the findings show the Government is not currently pursuing the strategic option of 'preserving opportunities', as proposed by the Commissioners. The report reveals that of the 49 recommendations proposed; only 20 were put into practice, 12 were partially implemented, and 17 recommendations were not implemented at all.

She says the absence of a national strategic decision from government on GMO release means it is highly likely that New Zealand will drift towards a GM future.

"Without a national decision-making process, the Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) will be the sole judge and jury for the first GM release application in what is an area of high uncertainty and complexity. Sustainable Future's research questions whether this situation meets the expectations of New Zealanders," she says.

Sustainable Future is a research organisation and think-tank on sustainability issues in New Zealand. Based in Wellington, Sustainable Future aims to be a provider of relevant, accurate and comprehensive information, accessible by all New Zealanders. Sustainable Future welcomes feedback on this report, which can be found at www.sustainablefuture.info

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