

Has MBIE short-circuited good process in recent government reforms?

New Zealand charity seeks public inquiries to investigate the conduct of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and the responsible Minister, the Hon Judith Collins in their undertaking of Gene Technology Regulatory reform and Science System reforms.

Press Release: Physicians & Scientists for Global Responsibility New Zealand (PSGR).

April, 16 2025.

A New Zealand charity, the Physicians & Scientists for Global Responsibility New Zealand (PSGR), has reviewed official documents involved in the production of the Gene Technology Bill and New Zealand's recent science system reforms and have published two white papers that call for two separate public inquiries.

PSGR have [written to the Ombudsman](#) asking that they convene a public inquiry to assess whether officials directly undermined public law conventions and processes to pursue policies and laws in favour of the deregulation of gene editing technology. PSGR have emailed members of Parliament to advise them of the complaint to the Ombudsman.

Secondly, PSGR are also calling for a 'transparent and public inquiry' that can (a) identify the factors leading to the collapse of the capacity of New Zealand's research, science, innovation and technology system to be adequately resourced to meet the objectives of society at large; and (b) recommend how to transform it into having that capacity, and in doing so serve the public purpose and support the wellbeing of New Zealand, her people, resources and environment.

PSGR is open on the issue of whether the second, science system enquiry should be a formal inquiry or a Royal Commission but believes that people should be asking why the important role of science and research in producing knowledge for the maximum benefit of society, has been perverted by prioritising commercial returns.

PSGR have published two papers under the title: '*When powerful agencies hijack democratic systems.*' The papers allege that government documents suggest that the Minister and MBIE officials may have acted to drive policy and legislative outcomes in a manner which may be neither fair nor impartial, but biased and potentially misleading. MPs have been sent these papers and advised of the complaint to the Ombudsman.

PSGR are concerned that officials may have sidelined and undermined important issues and conventions that are essential to sustain a robust, healthy, accountable democratic nation-state, in their haste to push through gene technology and science system reforms.

Lead researcher Jodie Bruning stated:

'Evidence points to these reforms severely restricting the capacity of the new gene technology regulator, and the New Zealand science system, to conduct activities intended to serve the public good and supporting constitutional and democratic government.'

The [Part I paper, *The case of gene technology regulatory reform*](#), recommends that the [Gene Technology Bill](#) is placed on hold and that the Ombudsman undertakes a formal review into the official conduct of MBIE and Judith Collins, to establish whether this body of officials directly undermined public law conventions and processes to pursue policies and laws in favour of the deregulation of gene editing technology.

Co-author and former Crown Research Institute researcher, Dr Elvira Dommissie stated:

‘The evidence suggests that the MBIE- funded Royal Society [undertook research](#) to communicate the benefits of new gene editing technologies, and used them to provide ideas for law reform. The National Party then took these recommendations and ran with them. MBIE and Judith Collins subsequently oversaw the drafting of legislation that excluded a wide range of these technologies from their proposed Bill. However, at no stage was there any formal process of assessing the risks of these excluded technologies.

This is of particular concern because if the Bill were passed, these technologies could be ramped up commercially, and released at scale. No-one would know’

PSGR are concerned that if members of Parliament (MPs) believe MBIE’s assurances that the [legislation](#) is fit for purpose, that they may be being misled. There has been [little or no scientific evaluation](#) to assure MPs that the risks can ever be managed in such a way that will fulfil the purpose of the Bill, which is to ‘protect the health and safety of people; and the environment’.

The [Part II paper, *The case of science system reform*](#), draws upon official documents to show how the science system reforms that are currently underway (2023-2024) have excluded any evaluation of the role of public good research in meeting the objectives of society at large. Instead, the current reforms will likely direct the RSI&T system away from optimising science and research to solve domestic problems and challenges.

Lead researcher Jodie Bruning stated:

‘MBIE officials know very well that ‘innovation’ is a proxy term for patents. They’ve directed the entire science system to promise a patent first, and then if we’re lucky this might trickle down into some other benefit. It’s the wrong way round. New Zealand has a very big problem when the Ministry responsible for innovation and economic growth controls the science system.’

The papers point to the extraordinary conundrum New Zealand is in. The conflict-of-interest which arises when the agency for economic growth, which controls the policy and funding for the entire science system, then takes action to secure control of legislative reforms that would reduce regulatory barriers to the very ‘innovations’ or technologies that that agency directly funds scientists to produce.

Jodie Bruning added that:

‘We’ve got an instance where one Ministry has extraordinary political and financial conflicts of interest, while also exercising effective control over how and what knowledge is produced for New Zealand as a nation. When that Ministry secured that massive control of the science system, it did not achieve this through an Act of Parliament, but via secondary legislation. This is an untenable situation for our science and research system, for the New Zealand people, and for our elected members.’

END.

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The Hijacking Democracy papers (released April 2025):

PSGR (2025) [When powerful agencies hijack democratic systems. Part I: The case of gene technology regulatory reform](#). Bruning, J.R., Dommissie, E.. Physicians & Scientists for Global Responsibility New Zealand. ISBN 978-1-0670678-0-9

PSGR (2025) [When powerful agencies hijack democratic systems. Part II: The case of science system reform](#). Bruning, J.R.. Physicians & Scientists for Global Responsibility New Zealand. April 2025. ISBN 978-1-0670678-1-6