

section 3.2 |



appendix 1

Context and process

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3.2 Scoping Meetings: the process

Introduction

After its appointment on 8 May 2000, the Commission requested preparation of background papers on nine major aspects of the subject of the Commission: current uses, legal aspects, ethical issues, public perceptions, Maori aspects, environmental aspects, economics, human health aspects and international aspects of genetic modification. These aspects were identified in the Commission's Warrant (its terms of reference). The authors writing these papers were asked also to provide a list of questions and issues likely to be considered during the course of the Commission's process. The lists of issues raised by authors of the background papers became the basis for the consultative activities of the Commission's Scoping Meetings.

By June 2000, the Commission had clarified how it might best fulfil its obligations to ensure that the people of New Zealand were fully consulted. It resolved that consultation should begin at the earliest possible stage, namely, in the organisation of the Commission's processes. The first event in scoping and consultation with the New Zealand public was an initial hui in Rotorua (see "Processes of the Commission: Maori Consultation" later in this volume). Then the Commission announced by public notice on 27 July 2000 that public meetings were to be held in Wellington on 7–9 August 2000 to scope the questions for subsequent submissions by Interested Persons and others so that no issues additional to those already identified might be overlooked in the deliberations. (For an explanation of Interested Person status — ie, having the right to present submissions to the Commission at Formal Hearings — see "Processes of the Commission: Formal Hearings" below.)

The Commission placed prominent advertisements for the Scoping Meetings in national newspapers, prepared an information pack for participants and established a website to enable a wide dissemination of information and to allow participation by the public in the course of the Commission's activities.

This section outlines the nature of the consultative process for the Scoping Meetings. It briefly describes:

- information for participants
- forms of participation
- mechanisms of participation.

Information for participants

Information on the Scoping Meetings was available as an information pack and on the Commission's website (<http://www.gmcommission.govt.nz/>). The information pack for participants in the meetings contained:

- an introduction to the Commission's planning for submissions
- a copy of the official Warrant (the terms of reference for the Commission) as published in *New Zealand Gazette* of 11 May 2000
- a translation of the Warrant in Maori
- a programme for each day of the meetings
- a list of key questions and discussion questions for each of the groups of issues: human health, consumer choice/labelling, cultural/spiritual, environmental, economic, future uses of genetic modification technology, ethical, global developments, strategic opportunities
- a glossary of genetic modification terms
- an application form for Interested Person status
- contact information.

Material posted on the Commission's website relating to the Scoping Meetings included the terms of the Warrant, the background papers, the programme for the meetings and information on how people could participate via the Internet if they could not attend the Wellington meetings.

Forms of participation

People could participate in establishing the range of issues to be considered by the Commission either in person at the Westpac Trust St James Theatre, Wellington, on any or all of the three days of Scoping Meetings or by participating in the online communications on the same days (7–9 August 2000) and for a period of 10 days thereafter. Some participants in the scoping process also sent written comment or emails to the Commission.

Direct participation

Up to 200 people attended each of the three Wellington meetings. Many attended all three. A powhiri was performed at the first Scoping Meeting to welcome participants to the consultative process.

The Opening Statement made by the Chair on behalf of the Commission stressed that the Commission had been established as an independent body to investigate and report on the issues arising. The task was a significant one, both for the New Zealand community and internationally. Government decisions following the Commission's Report might well be irreversible. So it was critical that the opportunity for a rational discussion was used to best advantage.

The Chair said that the Commission's processes would be open and inclusive. He outlined the various processes the Commission would follow, to fulfil its obligation to consult with the people of New Zealand. He referred to the fact that until the Commission had reported, and Government had made decisions on the outcome, the future direction of the country in regard to genetic modification was uncertain, and many important decisions would remain on hold. Thus it was important that the Commission should complete its task in a timely way.

In the workshop activity of the scoping process, a facilitator guided the sessions each day. Participants were given writing materials. They formed discussion groups of (usually) no more than nine members and elected a recorder and a reporter for each group. The facilitated meetings used a "consensus card sort" process (described below and in "Processes of the Commission: Public Meetings"), which was designed to maximise participation and to focus on an idea or issue rather than its presenter.

Online participation

People who were unable to attend the Wellington-based Scoping Meetings in person but who wished to express views on issues that the Commission should consider had the option of participating by means of the Internet. The online communications also enabled attendees of the meetings to express additional considerations after the discussion groups had ended.

Mechanisms of participation

Scoping process mechanisms involved:

- topics, issues and questions (a prior categorisation of the subject)

- “consensus card sort” process (the method used for on-the-spot reception and recording of contributions at the Scoping Meetings)
- the online contribution mechanism.

Topics, issues and questions

The three days of the Scoping Meetings were separated according to major topics relating to genetic modification: crops and food (7 August 2000), medical uses (8 August 2000) and international legal obligations/intellectual property issues/liability issues/Treaty of Waitangi (9 August 2000). Topics of days 1 and 2 were further broken down into important aspects of the Warrant: human health, consumer choice/labelling, cultural/spiritual issues, environmental issues, economic issues, future uses of genetic modification technology, ethical issues, global developments, and strategic opportunities and issues.

The information packs for the meetings contained a list of “key questions” (such as: “What are the health risks and benefits associated with GM foods?”) and “discussion questions” (such as: “What are the concerns about potential health hazards associated with GM crops or food, eg potential for new allergens, toxins, antibiotic resistance?”) on each topic. These questions were provided to help stimulate contributions but were subordinate to a single “overarching question” that was assigned to each topic/major aspect combination. As an example, participant groups in the meeting of day 1 (Crops/Food) block 1 (human health issues, consumer choice/labelling issues, cultural/spiritual issues) could choose to respond to one of three questions:

- What are the human health issues associated with the genetic modification of food and crops?
- What are the consumer choice and labelling issues associated with the genetic modification of food and crops?
- What are the cultural and spiritual issues associated with the genetic modification of food and crops?

“Consensus card sort” process

Under the “consensus card sort” process, a group selected its questions and members wrote responses on white “individual cards”, one issue or idea per card. The cards were gathered together, shuffled and redistributed. Participants voiced their interpretation of the written contribution of another individual. (The writer could clarify the issue if necessary.) Group members checked on the other cards that they held to see if the issue or idea was duplicated. Cards that the group

considered repeated the same contribution were stacked with the card under discussion. Then the issue or idea was summarised and written on a coloured “group card” to top the stack.

Repetition of the process within the group resulted in all individual card contributions sorted into piles topped by coloured group cards. The stacks were then sorted into category, again by group consensus, and the categories recorded on flip charts as a summary of the group’s deliberations.

Online contribution mechanism

The Internet process used:

- an online publication, with information on meeting programmes and other background information, instructions on how to participate, the key issues under discussion and the facilitator’s summaries
- an email newsletter containing summaries of items under discussion, with links to further information on the publication and the “consensus card sort” process
- a “views recorder” allowing online participants to record their views as “virtual attendees” of the Scoping Meetings, as well as allowing meeting attendees to add any contributions that they were unable to record at the meeting sessions.

A help-desk assisted contributors to register for online participation. Throughout the course of each day’s meeting facilitators continually updated the online publication and included a summary of the day’s findings.

During the 10-day period that the online participation mechanism was active, it enabled people to contribute to the scoping process or to view the proceedings and contributions without limitation of geography or time of day. Several hundred online contributions were received. Individual online contributions, together with summaries of the issues developed at the Scoping Meetings and the written contributions, were available to the public via the Commission’s website during this period. A summary of the issues raised throughout the entire scoping process was retained on the website after the online participation ended.

The outcomes of the Scoping Meeting process (ie, three days of meetings and online participation, as well as some written contributions) are reported in Appendix 3 (see “Scoping Meetings: Summary of outcomes”).