

section 4.3 |



appendix 3

Outcomes of Consultation: Submissions from the Public

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4.3 Analysis of views relating to Maori raised by the Youth Forum

Background

A Youth Forum to obtain views of young New Zealanders on genetic modification was held at Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa, Museum of New Zealand) in Wellington on 5 March 2001. The nature of the event and its programme are outlined in Appendix 1 (see “Youth Forum: the process”) and a summary of the outcomes is provided in this volume (see “Youth Forum: summary of outcomes”).

Participants at the Youth Forum identified seven major topics for discussion, including the Treaty of Waitangi (together with cultural issues). This part of the report briefly describes the forum from the point of view of comment on Maori and genetic modification, and the impact of the Treaty of Waitangi.

The forum was attended by 99 young people of whom 14 identified themselves as Maori. Many of these came from the South Island (from Nelson and Blenheim). Others came from the Wellington/Wairarapa area, and one from Napier.

Views expressed

Comment on Maori in relation to genetic modification arose through several aspects of the Youth Forum: through competition essays, from role-play and through a brainstorming session.

Essays

In preparing for the forum, the Commission conducted a national essay competition to select 20 young people aged between 16 and 18 from outside Wellington to attend the event. The Commission paid the travel costs of these 20 young people. All the winning essays have been placed on the Commission website.

The essay topic was “What future does genetic modification have in New Zealand?” One winning essay was written by a young person who identified herself as Maori.

Two of the essays, by non-Maori, made specific reference to Maori views. Both essays noted Maori objections to genetic modification as an interference with whakapapa and mauri, and one referred to Maori concerns about protection of native flora and fauna. This essay stated that “in the future there should be “stronger” discussions on genetic modification among Maori.

The other essay referred to the rejection by Ngati Tuwharetoa of a proposal by a company to field-test genetically modified pine trees. The writer went on to suggest that Maori cultural concerns are similar in many areas to those of the wider community, but that such views “cannot be allowed to stifle research that can provide such massive benefits to the community, benefits that Maori themselves acknowledge”.

Role-play

Part of the programme for the day involved a role-play session to look at different perspectives in the genetic modification debate. Ten participants were selected to take on specified roles, including medical scientist, parent-to-be, environmentalist and iwi representative. The “iwi representative”, a young Maori woman, expressed the view that genetic modification is a “Waitangi issue” and that thought needed to be given to how Maori feel about genetic modification. She herself indicated that she did not like the idea of taking “fish from Tangaroa and blending them with birds from Tane Mahuta. It doesn’t work that way”. This view received support from another Maori attendee at the Forum.

Other role-players suggested that Maori would benefit from genetic modification-based medicines, or that there was little point in dividing the human race into, say, Europeans and Maori, since, from the genetic point of view, there was little difference.

Treaty of Waitangi

Arising out of the role-play and a brainstorming session, the Treaty of Waitangi (and cultural issues) were identified as one of seven major elements of the genetic modification debate. In addition to the comments on the Treaty set out in the following section (see “Youth Forum: summary of outcomes”), the view was expressed that if the Treaty is accepted as a political agreement between Maori and the Crown, then cultural issues should not be considered “under” the Treaty. There were comments on the nature of New Zealand society, and whether it can be regarded as “bicultural” or multicultural. There was a sense that Maori were opposed to genetic modification, and concern over what this meant for the future of genetic modification in New Zealand. One suggestion was that the Maori perspective should be respected, but not predominate, as New Zealand was “a

multicultural society”. A supporting comment indicated that the Treaty required Maori views to be considered, but that genetic modification could not be stopped purely on the basis of Maori opposition.

An alternative view from a Maori attendee was that New Zealand was “bicultural” in a political sense, with the relationship being between Maori and the Crown, “and that’s probably why the consultation goes more between Maori and Pakeha as opposed to the minority groups”.

A further suggestion from a Maori attendee was that genetic modification issues should not be considered until contemporary Treaty claims before the Waitangi Tribunal had been heard.

Conclusion

The views expressed by rangatahi (young Maori) attending the Forum generally mirror the views of the Maori community as expressed in submissions to the Commission. In particular, the concern about mixing the genes of different species, and the reference to the relationship between Maori and the Crown reflected in the Treaty of Waitangi are matters frequently raised in Maori submissions.

Comments from non-Maori youth indicate some understanding of the basis of Maori concerns from the point of view of tikanga concepts such as whakapapa and mauri. However, there was a degree of confusion over how to describe New Zealand society and the role of the Treaty of Waitangi.