
[Press Release on the open letter sent to Subsidiary Body of the Convention on Biological Diversity demanding a ban on the release of genetically engineered trees](#)

On 19 February 2008, a large number of civil society organizations sent an open letter to the Convention on Biological Diversity's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, currently meeting in Rome, expressing their "deep concern" about genetic engineering of trees.

In only one week, the letter was signed by 138 organizations in countries where research on the genetic engineering of trees is being carried out, (or has in recent years). Those countries are: Aotearoa / New Zealand, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, United Kingdom and USA.

The signatories begin by stating that their "concern is based on the fact that the genetic manipulation being undertaken is aimed at consolidating and further expanding a model of monoculture tree plantations that has already proven to result in serious social and environmental impacts in many of our countries."

The letter provides a number of examples on how current research would impact on the environment, given that trees are being genetically manipulated for:

- faster tree growth, which would "further aggravate the proven impacts on water resources" since it would mean "even greater consumption of water by tree plantations".
- resistance to cold temperatures -for the purpose of planting trees in colder regions and at higher altitudes in the mountains- that "would lead to social and environmental impacts in regions that until now have not been affected by the impacts of current tree monocultures."
- trees with insecticide properties to make them resistant to insects, that "could result in the death of a large number of other insect species, with consequent impacts on local fauna's food chains".
- resistance to herbicides, which "would lead to even more serious social and environmental impacts, including the destruction of local flora and impacts on human health."
- higher cellulose content that "would mean reducing the amount of lignin, the component that provides trees with structural strength, thus making them more susceptible to suffering serious damage during wind storms."

The signatories remind country delegates that "the last Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-8) adopted decision VIII/19", which "recommends Parties to take a precautionary approach when addressing the issue of genetically modified trees" and urge them "to definitely ban GE trees -including fields trials "because of the serious risks they pose on the Planet's

biological diversity."

[Full letter and signatories available here](#)