
[Aotearoa/New Zealand: Opposition to genetically engineered trees](#)

While genetic engineering applied to food production is provoking concern among consumers and citizens and many scientists express their doubts and criticism in relation to it, big food, forestry and energy corporations are engaged in developing genetically modified trees, expected to be able to grow faster and to contain components desired by industry. (see WRM Bulletins 26 and 27)

Last August the Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) of New Zealand received through a specially created web site (www.context.co.nz), up to 700 submissions on genetically engineered pine trees. This initiative of participatory democracy with regard to an important environmental issue is part of the evaluation process of the application made by the Forest Research Institute (FRI) to ERMA in order to make a field trial of genetically engineered pine trees in the open environment. It is important to highlight that until now this new system had never received more than 50 submissions, which clearly shows the public's concern over this issue.

Out of the 700 submissions, the vast majority were critical to the field trial. Mario Rautner, Greenpeace's campaigner on genetically engineered trees, expressed that the results clearly show that the public does not agree with the release of genetically engineered trees into the country's open environment. "We are calling on the FRI to accept the public opposition to this experiment. We would like to see the FRI applying the voluntary moratorium and halting this field trial now. Genetically engineered trees could pose a very serious threat to the environment and we oppose this unpredictable experiment with nature" he added. The question is whether the authorities will act according to the public's desires and definitively give up the field trial or if they will respond to the interest of industry.

It is to be underscored that the inclusion of tree plantations as supposed carbon sinks under the CDM of the Kyoto Protocol would mean a boost for the development of biotechnology in the forestry sector, arguing that GE trees would be able to grow faster and then to absorb more CO₂ in less time. An additional risk that should be taken in account by climate negotiators in the next meeting at The Hague.