

The Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Primary Industries and Regional Services  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: SUBMISSION ON PRIMARY PRODUCER ACCESS TO GENE TECHNOLOGY**

I refer to the advertisement in the Courier Mail on the 14 April 1999 seeking submissions from interested parties on the inquiry into primary producer access to gene technology.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) is primarily concerned that the inquiry accommodates consumer issues such as consumer information and education, representation and consultation, health and safety, environment, competitive pricing, quality and choice.

The OFT is particularly interested in the last term of reference on educating the community on the benefits of gene technology. For some years now Australian consumer groups and the media have drawn attention to the lack of information regarding public concerns of health, safety, environmental effects, social and ethical considerations of gene technology. The OFT supports the provision of information and education programs to the community, however stresses that a balanced approach needs to be taken by addressing both the benefits and risks of gene technology and promoting critical discussion and informed community debate.

Further, to aid in transparency of process, the community and its representatives should have a clear avenue and be encouraged to provide input into the decision-making in programs which affect the community interest.

A concern that has also been expressed in the community is the consequences of a concentration of ownership of food resources into a small number of multinational companies, and in particular their control over all aspects of food growth, production and supply. Such domination could reduce the ability of smaller producers to compete using traditionally available varieties and could impact on the variety, quality and cost of products available to consumers preferring traditionally grown or produced primary products.

I trust that this information assists in your inquiry and thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Stewart Jones  
**Principal Policy Officer**