



Speech by

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GENE TECHNOLOGY BILL

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (6.26 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Gene Technology Bill 2001. I would like to refer to parts of the article that was published in the *Australian* on 9 December 2000 about the passing of the Commonwealth Gene Technology Bill. It states—

Scientists involved in human cloning risk 10-year jail terms and protesters two years' jail for damaging genetically modified crops, under Australia's first gene laws passed by the Senate.

A Gene Technology Regulator will be set up with the same sweeping powers as the federal police and the tax office to inspect laboratories and farms for illegal GM activity.

The laws... make it a crime to experiment with GM crops, animals, viruses or vaccines without approval from the gene regulator. States will be able to declare 'GM-free' zones and the location of modified crops will be made public unless a regulator rules that to do so would pose a 'significant risk' to public health.

But to ease farmers' fears about environmental protesters destroying their GM crops, the Gene Technology Bill imposes two-year jail terms and \$13,200 fines for damaging or preventing authorised gene modification activity.

All food with GM ingredients will have to be labelled from the end of next year, under separate laws announced by Australian and New Zealand Health ministers.

...

The bill outlaws human cloning with 10-year jail terms and \$220,000 fines.

The same penalty will apply to researchers who put human cells into animal eggs, or implant animal cells into a woman's womb.

The gene regulator will have to publish details of all GM applications it receives, and contact state governments, the federal environment minister and relevant local councils for comment.

The public will have at least 30 days to comment on applications for GM licences and the regulator will have to assess risks to the environment, health and safety.

A Gene Ethics Committee with members experienced in law, religion, health, and environment and farming will be set up to advise the regulator. And 'gene police' will be given the power to enter and search premises to collect evidence for prosecutions.

Under the legislation, companies or farmers that breach their GM licences or operate without a licence risk five-year jail terms and fines of up to \$1.1 million.

The article states further that there has been some criticism of the bill as being—

...'weak and dangerous' because it did not require licences for 'low-risk' GM dealings or require GM crop growers to take out insurance against the spread of mutant genes.

A spokesman from the Organic Federation of Australia has said that the laws governing the use of GMOs, such as crops and GM foods, will be overseen by a regulatory body. He said that this will not work because they do not adequately regulate the handling of GM crops and, without that regulation, GM crops could contaminate other plants.

It is interesting that gene technology involves the control or modification of genes through the manipulation of DNA, the code of inheritance. It alters the genetic code of an individual chromosome cell or organism. Those alterations can be brought about by changing the code within a gene and adding information to the code, which can then turn a gene off or on, move a gene to a different place in a chromosome within the same nucleus or move a gene from one organism to another. In conclusion, it is not hard to see why this is a very controversial subject for most Queenslanders as they worry about how it will affect not only their crops but the very existence of human and animal life.