

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of Proposed Natural Resources Plan of the Greater Wellington Regional Council

**JOINT HEARING OF SUBMISSIONS BY COMMISSIONERS OF THE
GREATER WELLINGTON REGIONAL COUNCIL**

**EVIDENCE OF JAMES KEBBELL
ON BEHALF OF
GE FREE NEW ZEALAND**

DATED: 30 May 2017

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

In summary, my evidence:

- States my background and expertise
- Expresses concerns about the effects of GMO's on the Organic Industry
- Supports a precautionary approach to GMOs/GE being in the Proposed Natural Resources Plan.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

1. My name is James Kebbell and I am the major shareholder and Executive Director of Commonsense Organics Ltd.
2. I am also an equal half shareholder of Common Property Ltd a certified Organic Horticultural Unit of 28 acres at Te Horo.
3. I have been involved in the Organic industry since 1983 when Common Property became one of the first properties to be certified by BioGro NZ, and I was a member of the Council of that body for 10 years and Chairperson for three. I am one of three Life Members.

OUTLINE OF ENTERPRISE

4. Common Property Ltd is an Organically Certified horticultural unit at Te Horo, some 70 kms north of Wellington. It was founded in 1975 primarily as a teaching unit for unemployed or unskilled young people and was supported by various governments through a number of works skills programmes.
5. In the early 1980's there was a need to establish an Organic Growing Standard in line with the rest of the world. In 1983 BioGro was established and we were foundation members.
6. Commonsense Organics was started in 1991 as a grocery store primarily dedicated to providing organic products, both fresh and processed, to the wider community. In the early stages available products were largely fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy, meat, grains, flours and some processed goods such as soups, relishes, and tinned beans, less than 2000 lines in all. Since then not only has the market grown but so have the number of organic lines and we now stock closer to 9000 lines in six stores, five in the Wellington Region and one in Auckland employing over 120 staff.

7. Common Property supplies a wide variety of vegetables as well as strawberries to our Organic Stores.
8. The organic food sector is one of the fastest growing food sectors globally. In Denmark 8.4% of total food sales are organic. In Austria, 21% of all farm land is certified organic. Globally organic food is a US\$85 billion industry. This is a huge export market of which New Zealand is only just beginning to take advantage.
9. In New Zealand Colmar Brunton's Better Futures Reports of 2015 and 2016 both show that a clear majority of consumers (71%) would pay more for organic or ethically produced foods and 83% would not buy a product if they knew the company followed unethical or environmentally damaging practices.
10. Our customers tend to be well educated and understand the problems associated with modern industrial agriculture, such as degradation of soils, pollution of waterways and overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. A significant number of our customers are parents with young families determined to give their children the most nutritious and chemical free food on the market.
11. They also understand that industrial farming is a major contributor to climate change through its reliance on fossil fuels and fertilisers. Organic farming not only does not use highly soluble chemicals that have a deleterious effect on our environment, especially the waterways, but its methods store carbon in the soil.
12. Increasing reliance on GMO seeds has substantially increased the use of pesticides including Glyphosate which was originally designed and developed and marketed under the name of "ROUNDUP READY". Glyphosate is the most used herbicide on the planet and has been declared to be a probable carcinogen by the World Health Organisation. The report declaring glyphosate as a probable carcinogen is **attached** to my evidence as "A".
13. It is interesting to note that the New York Times on the 14th March 2017 reported the fact that: "*The reputation of Roundup, whose active ingredient is the world's most widely used weed killer, took a hit on Tuesday when a federal court unsealed documents raising questions about its safety and the research practices of its manufacturer, the chemical giant Monsanto.*" The documents referred to record the internal cover up of Monsanto's own research into the effects of glyphosate. The article is **attached** to my evidence as "B".

REGULATION

14. International Organic Standards absolutely prohibit the use of GMO's in all forms of food production. In countries where GMO's are permitted there is always a danger of cross contamination which has led to the emergence of super weeds resistant to herbicides. It may lead to the demise of organic production and to the loss of many of our markets for conventional food which are becoming increasingly reluctant to accept foods produced from GMO seed.

15. GMO seeds were originally promoted as a partial solution to the need for increased food production globally as they were higher yielding, more suited to mono-cropping and therefore cheaper. They have not lived up to their promise even in the short term where the high yields have not always been maintained. Because they have allowed and even required a higher use of pesticides, land has become less fertile and yields have stagnated. But they were never in themselves going to contribute to the world's food shortages which are not so much a problem of shortage but of distribution. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations estimates that there is now enough food produced to feed the current global population but that it is badly distributed and a significant proportion is wasted.

CONCLUSION

16. I recommend that a precautionary approach to GMO's should be included in the Proposed Natural Resources Plan given that still little is known of the long term effect that GMO's may have on the environment. Predicting the effects of introduced life forms has never been easy and this country has suffered enormously from the introduction of species that have proliferated as pests and are extremely difficult to eradicate if not impossible.

17. The release of GMO's into the area of the Greater Wellington Region will most likely herald the demise of the organic industry in the area and will seriously weaken the case for conventional exports purporting to come from a clean and green environment.

Dated: 30 May 2017

James Kebbell