

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Coffey Warned Gene Editing Bill Should not Include Wild Animals and Pets**

A leading campaign group, Beyond GM, has written to Thérèse Coffey, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, to urge amendments to the controversial Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill, which is set to have its Report Stage in the House of Lords on Wednesday (25<sup>th</sup> January).

The Bill<sup>1</sup> opens the door to the introduction of gene edited animals and crops in the UK food and farming system while removing requirements for monitoring and labelling – something which UK consumers have consistently said they do not want. But what government has kept quiet is that the provisions in the bill go much further, encompassing pets as well as wild plants and animals.

In its letter to Coffey, Beyond GM Director Pat Thomas has urged the government to take action to remove non-agricultural and wild plants, as well as companion and wild animals from the scope of the Bill, which is rapidly advancing through parliament.

Late in 2022, Beyond GM commissioned research with YouGov which demonstrated widespread opposition to aspects of the Bill including significant concerns about traceability and labelling and a lack of faith in government's ability to regulate responsibly.

According to the YouGov Poll<sup>2</sup>, the overwhelming preference of UK citizens is for all GMOs in the farming and food system – including the bill's newly invented category of "precision bred organisms" – to be regulated, traceable and labelled: 79% of adults in the UK think that precision bred crops, animals and foods should be clearly labelled on the food package.

Thomas notes that three government agencies<sup>3</sup> have declared the bill "not fit for purpose", "unclear" and unconstitutional, having failed to provide "adequate justification" for the delegated powers that it confers.

"It is clear that despite the significant concerns about the Bill, including those raised in the House of Lords during Committee<sup>4</sup>, the government has chosen to ignore the warnings of scientists, economists and environment and animal welfare experts as well as the preference of UK citizens. There are genuine concerns that the removal of requirements for labelling also removes the rights of consumers to know what they are eating.

But as Thomas notes, "Wild animals and plants don't come with labels. They could be released into our environment with nothing more than the developer's say-so that they will do no harm."

The one thing the bill does do, through multiple Henry VIII clauses, is give the Secretary of State significant powers to make changes to the Bill.

"She should begin now, by limiting the scope of the bill to agriculture. Otherwise, we are facing a genetic engineering free-for-all with gene edited puppies and kittens in the pet shop, trees in the woods, grass in the parks and fish in the streams. And since genetically engineered processes and organisms are subject to patents, a big question mark hangs over who will own these new creations – and what kind of use by members of the public might constitute an infringement of that patent."

Thomas adds “The government has allowed the biotech industry to write this bill and to dictate terms that remove any meaningful regulatory control. Instead of protecting the environment, our plants, our animals and our people, the government has been weaving a deceitful narrative in order to pursue an extreme techno and corporate agenda that recognises no natural limits.”

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#### **References**

- 1 <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3167/publications>
- 2 <https://beyond-gm.org/yougov-poll-uk-citizens-demand-robust-regulation-of-gmos>
- 3 The [Regulatory Policy Committee](#), the [Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee](#) and the [Constitution Committee](#)) have all issued strong criticism of the bill. Government has not answered these concerns.
- 4 See [day one](#) and day two [here](#) and [here](#).

#### **Note to Editors**

The proposal to use genetic engineering technologies to alter wild nature has been put forwards by some conservation organisations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Beyond GM’s A Bigger Conversation website features some background [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

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