



# Submission

*17 February 2025*

TO

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**Health Select Committee**

ON THE

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**Gene Technology Bill**

BY

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**Beef + Lamb New Zealand Ltd**

# SUBMISSION ON THE GENE TECHNOLOGY BILL

**To the:** Health Select Committee

**Email:** Health@parliament.govt.nz

**Name of Submitter:** Beef + Lamb New Zealand Limited

**Date:** 17 February 2025

## Contact Details:

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## 1. Introduction

Beef + Lamb New Zealand (B+LNZ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Health Select Committee (the Committee) on the Gene Technology Bill (the Bill).

We support a review of the regulatory framework governing use of gene technology in New Zealand. A review is overdue given the development in the area of gene technologies since New Zealand last considered its position on the issue in the wake of the Royal Commission on Genetic Modification in 2000/01.

We see opportunity in the use of gene technology for animal health, environmental management, biodiversity protection and climate resilience.

We do, however, have concerns with the Bill and these are highlighted in the submission. Key among these are:

- The level of consultation and public engagement in the development of the Bill to date;
- Management of market risks associated with the adoption of gene technology;
- Co-existence of gene technology with 'traditionally-bred' species; and
- A lack of clarity on how different levels of risk will be determined, which in turn makes it difficult to assess level of caution.

## 2. About Beef + Lamb New Zealand

B+LNZ is the farmer-owned industry good organisation representing New Zealand's sheep and beef farmers. B+LNZ is funded under the Commodity Levies Act 1990 through a levy paid by producers on all cattle and sheep commercially slaughtered in New Zealand. B+LNZ's purpose is to provide insights and actions that drive tangible impact for farmers.

Relevant areas in which we are actively involved include:

- Environmental management and stewardship through our farmer extension activities;
- Environment and trade policy through our policy and advocacy function;
- Sheep and beef genetics through B+LNZ Genetics; and
- Research and development on issues affecting pastures, animal health etc, through our innovation programme.

B+LNZ represents around 9,300 commercial farming businesses, and a third of New Zealand's total land area is used for sheep and beef farming. The wider red meat sector supports over 92,000 jobs, 35,702 directly and an additional 56,719 indirectly employed, mainly in regional New Zealand.

The sector exports over 90 percent of its production to over 110 markets and is New Zealand's second largest goods exporter and New Zealand's largest manufacturing industry. New Zealand accounts for around five percent of global beef trade and 33 percent of global sheepmeat trade.

### 3. Farmer Engagement

The adoption of gene technologies is a complex issue, and one that is polarising within the farming community. As the Committee will already be aware, B+LNZ does not consider that the deadlines set for submissions to be provided to the Committee were appropriate given that context, and given that the time of year over which submissions could be developed provided limited opportunity to engage with farmers.

We sought an extension to the Select Committee process to allow for engagement (in a joint letter alongside the Meat Industry Association, DairyNZ and the Dairy Companies Association), but this call was rejected. As such, this submission is based upon preliminary engagement held with farmers in August 2024, and in particular a survey of farmers' views on gene technology commissioned by B+LNZ (the Survey).

Some key points on the methodology used for the Survey are that:

- The target population for the Survey was sheep and beef farmers on the B+LNZ levy payer database;
- The sample was randomly selected and representative across farm types and regions; and
- The sample size for the Survey was n=427. For a 50% figure at the 95% confidence level, the margin of error for this sized sample is plus or minus 4.7%

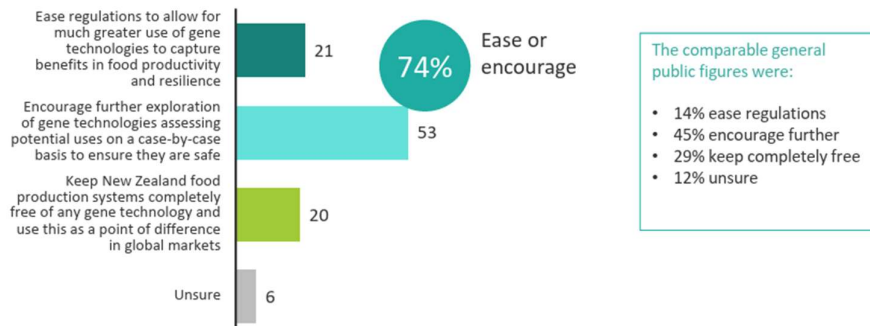
Key findings from the survey are set out below:

#### Most farmers support allowing greater use of gene technologies in food production



As you may be aware:

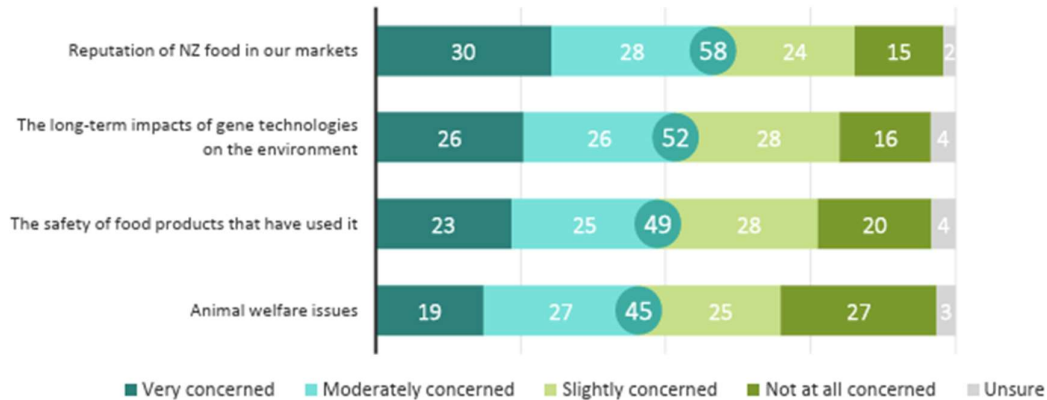
- Gene technologies can help improve crops and livestock for traits like disease resistance, better nutrition, and to help manage the impacts of climate change
  - Some people see potential risks, as they feel like its interfering with nature
  - New Zealand currently maintains strict regulations for the use of gene technologies. The Government intends to introduce changes to allow for greater use of gene technologies for growing food in New Zealand, they propose that any changes will come with strong protections for human health and the environment
- Considering this, which of the following option aligns closest to your view as to how New Zealand should approach using gene technologies for growing food?



In addition, 69% of farmers knew either 'nothing' or 'not that much' on the use of gene technology in growing food, and there were a range of reasons for farmers' caution, as per the graph below:



How concerned are you about the following potential risks of using gene technology?



Based upon this limited engagement, our assessment of sheep and beef farmer sentiment is that most farmers support a reform of gene technology regulation, but equally most farmers see a need to proceed cautiously based on case-by-case risk assessment. The key areas of concern among farmers were market-based (reputation and food safety) or ethically-based (environmental impacts and animal welfare).

As a final point on farmer engagement, the Survey is broadly consistent with the informal feedback received from farmers during B+LNZ’s Director Roadshows held over July-September 2024, where it was clear that there was a division of views among farmers. The common thread was that on all sides of the debate views were held passionately.

### 3. Comment on the Bill

#### 3.1 Risk Classification Criteria

B+LNZ is concerned that the Bill does not provide sufficient guidance on how a gene technology regulator (the Regulator) would classify different gene technologies. This is a particular concern where support for reform of gene technology regulation is contingent on case-by-case risk assessment (which as noted above was a majority view among sheep and beef farmers in the Survey).

Our understanding of the Bill is that the Regulator would place gene technologies into one of four categories:

- Unregulated: *‘Use freely’*
- Regulated – Non-notifiable: *‘Use freely, but the Regulator reserves the right to increase scrutiny’*
- Regulated – Notifiable: *‘Regulator must be informed if a gene technology is used, but otherwise use freely’*
- Licenced: *‘Gene technology can only be used with a license from the Regulator’*

In deciding how to categorise, the Regulator must consider ‘risk’, and could **only** consider the following in relation to ‘risk’:

- Impact on human health;

- Impact on environment, which includes—
  - (a) ecosystems and their constituent parts; and
  - (b) natural and physical resources; and
  - (c) the qualities and characteristics of locations, places, and areas

We will touch upon whether other risk factors need to be considered below, but the point we wish to make here is that the Bill provides little detail on risk assessment. Given that risk assessment is central to support for reforming gene technology regulation amongst farmers, this makes supporting the Bill difficult as a key piece is missing.

**Recommendation 1:** B+LNZ recommends an implementation and transition period that allows for input on the underpinning detail of risk assessment.

### 3.2 Market Impacts and Traceability

The Bill provides for gene technologies to be assessed solely on the basis of human health and environmental risks, and B+LNZ supports an objective approach to risk assessment. However, as a food-exporting nation our approach to use and regulation of gene technology must have an eye to our international markets.

B+LNZ does not see a role for the Regulator in assessing consumer demands and trends. This introduces greater subjectivity into the risk assessment, and is an area where commercial operators are far better placed to assess and respond to overseas customer and consumer preferences than government.

However, where overseas regulators have moved to restrict gene technology practices is an objective consideration of market access impacts. B+LNZ submits that this needs to be provided for in New Zealand's regulatory framework for gene technology.

Related to this is a critical question around traceability, and where the costs of product differentiation should fall. Again, it is not clear to B+LNZ how this fits into a wider regulatory framework and we seek further engagement with Government on this.

**Recommendation 2:** B+LNZ recommends that assessment of risks should remain objective and the Regulator should not be asked to consider customer or consumer preference in its risk assessment.

**Recommendation 3:** B+LNZ recommends that this legislation is considered alongside the Animal Products Act and other export-enabling legislation to ensure market access requirements are considered and coherent.

## 4. Oral Submissions

B+LNZ welcomes further engagement with the Committee to address the concerns we have raised, **and specifically seeks an opportunity** to make further oral submissions to the Committee.