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Media Release
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Genetic modification and gene editing technologies – is New Zealand ready for a conversation?

Sir Peter Gluckman, former Chief Science Advisor to the Prime Minister and Head of the Centre for Science in Policy, Diplomacy and Society (SciPoDS) of the University of Auckland, will ask the question: are we ready to have an ongoing conversation about new technologies that are likely to have an enormous impact on our economy and society?

At a keynote speech to the Horticulture NZ conference on Wednesday 31st July, Sir Peter revisited the particularly contentious history of genetic modification (GM) in NZ. Although arguments against its use, such as food safety, can be scientifically addressed, this does not resolve the matter which is primarily around differences in *values*, which is not for science to resolve. As a result, Sir Peter noted, the debate became mired in rhetoric, and conflated with politics.

An outcome of the 2001 Royal Commission on GM was effectively a moratorium that still remains in place to this day. However, new gene-based technologies such as gene editing, which have little in common with traditional GM technologies, are also subject to the moratorium. Yet, no deep conversation has taken place about the potential advantages and downsides of such evolving technologies in a New Zealand context. A more adaptive approach to technology regulation is needed in such contexts and has implications far beyond any particular technology into areas such as the digital domains.

As a biological based economy, New Zealand will confront looming issues of climate change, food security, and biosecurity. So, how should society regulate fast moving and evolving technologies? Is our current political system and approach able to handle these issues? Most importantly, are we ready for an informed, non-judgmental values dialogue?

Whether we do or do not end up using evolving technologies, Sir Peter emphasises that having such dialogues is absolutely critical. Without such discussion, we are left uncertain as to what will be best for New Zealand in the long term.

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