



Meta Are Still Fact Checking in New Zealand and the Gene Technology Bill is on Their Radar

# Hatchard Report

Dr. Guy Hatchard

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Judith Collins is promising us an economic miracle if only she can deregulate biotechnology. According to Collins, gene technology research using CRISPR will be a money spinner. She is absolutely right, but it won't benefit New Zealand.

CRISPR techniques are subject to patents. They can be licensed for use by academic laboratories, but if you want to commercialise a product produced using CRISPR it comes at a cost, a huge cost. For example, in 2023, Vertex Pharmaceuticals in Boston, Massachusetts, secured approval to sell its CRISPR-based treatment for sickle-cell disease only after paying \$50 million in up front fees to a licence-holder authorised by the Broad Institute, a genomic-research centre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that holds the patents. It seems that any CRISPR money spinning largely takes place in America, which is why US trade negotiators are reportedly demanding biotech deregulation as a precondition of a free trade agreement with New Zealand.

Which brings us to another point. Will the Gene Technology Bill benefit public health as Auntie Collins tells us? Examples of benefits of gene technology are a rare animal indeed (disasters abound), but one has had its share of headlines recently. Gene therapy treatments for sickle-cell anaemia cost about NZ\$6 million per person and they involve bone marrow transplants. The mortality rates after bone marrow transplants reported in the published literature range from a massive 74% to 10% depending on a number of factors including the pre-existing health of the individual. The massive costs and low survival rates are not going to impact New Zealand's appalling public health statistics, only our balance sheet.

More and more as every day goes by Collins is beginning to sound like Bernie Madoff, but will gene technology allow us to live longer? You might have come across [Bryan Johnson](#), the billionaire poster child for longevity via gene technology. He has a Netflix series devoted to his quest to live forever. Bryan's every move is governed by the advice of his team of 30 doctors. According to some reports in glossy magazines, he believes he has succeeded in reducing the age of every one of his organs by upwards of 30%. The Netflix documentary lauds Bryan's use of immunosuppressant *rapamycin* which, along with 54 other pills, is supposedly helping him to live forever.

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What Netflix did not tell us: Johnson stopped taking the drug because he found [the side effects were too severe](#) including a rather icky looking skin rash on his otherwise trim frame along with *“soft tissue infections, abnormal levels of fats in his blood, elevated blood sugar and a higher resting heart rate”*. Johnson decided rapamycin just might have been making him age faster. His doctors sheepishly admitted they had been encouraging him to take the drug whose *“side effects include very dangerous bacterial infections, and things like pneumonia or cellulitis or pharyngitis.”* If I was Bryan, I’d change my doctors.

The devil is always in the detail, and there are a great many details about the risks of gene technology that the government has forgotten to tell us about. In 2023, the University of Auckland, to great fanfare reportedly identified a drug *alpelisib* that helped mice live 10% longer, but the side effects included weaker bones and higher blood sugar—a known cause of diabetes. ***A drug that helps you live longer is not much use if it makes you chronically sick and terminally ill.*** Which reminds me of something else.

If you are reading this, you are one of the lucky ones, you have lasted through five pandemic years, but studies show not all of us have been that lucky, including about 30 million worldwide unexpectedly no longer with us. In the light of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Wuhan Virology Lab, listening to Judith Collins lecture us about the safety and health benefits of deregulating biotechnology all helps to cement the Bernie Madoff impersonation.

In an unlikely volte-face [Mark Zuckerberg speaking with Joe Rogan](#) has changed sides. According to Zuckerberg, Biden administration officials *“screamed and cursed”* at Meta executives to take down posts critical of COVID-19 vaccine safety. Specifically, any mention of vaccine side effects was censored by the US government. Anything, including human lives, that might come in the way of \$100 billion US pharmaceutical industry COVID-19 vaccine profits was off the table in the White House.

In an act of atonement, Zuckerberg has announced that FB posts will no longer be subject to ‘fact checking’. BUT this is only being trialled in the USA. So unfortunately none of this backtracking will have dented the enthusiasm of New Zealand mainstream media to persecute those shining a light in dark places.

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I received a polite email this week from Kiwi journalist George Driver who is an official 'fact checker' for Facebook who queried one of my [recent posts](#). According to Driver, he is working hard for Meta "to mitigate misinformation in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands." He queried my claim that the Gene Technology Bill will "bypass the medical choice provisions of the New Zealand Bill of Rights". He questioned whether the Bill was being *fast tracked* and required evidence that shows the Bill would remove a person's right to refuse a medical treatment. I answered as follows and I am sending this out to you because I am not sure what the final outcome will be as far as Facebook is concerned.

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*Dear George*

*Thanks for writing. There are a number of points to consider here. In short:*

*1. Formerly, labelling of gene altered food was required via HSNO legislation. The Gene Technology Bill effectively rescinds the requirement for mandatory labelling. Thus some gene altered foods will enter the food chain without the public's knowledge. This not only bypasses public choice but also has implications for individual health. For example it could affect individuals with food allergies.*

*2. My use of the term Fast Track was intended to mean that the coalition is making its passage a priority. In particular, contrary to usual practice, the public submission process is taking place over the holiday period. This appears to be designed to move the bill forward under the radar. Btw, your final sentence misquotes me 'was "passed under fast track legislation"? Should be 'is being' not 'was'.*

*3. The Mandatory wording in the bill is as follows "**Mandatory medical activity authorisations:** for a human medicine that is or contains gene technology that has been approved by at least two recognised overseas gene technology regulators." The emergency use wording is as follows "**Emergency authorisations:** when there is an actual or imminent threat to the health and safety of people or to the environment, for example, threat from a disease outbreak, or an industrial spillage, the Minister responsible for the Gene Technology Act (Judith Collins) will have the power to grant an emergency authorisation."*

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*The intent of these clauses (which is not made sufficiently clear in the Bill) is mystifying nor is the reason for their inclusion obvious or explicitly justified. The implications of the wording of both taken together are so general that the regulator and the Minister are granted very wide powers which could be used to legally justify mandatory public health measures involving the use of gene technology. This might include environmental and health measures that affect individuals generally. Because these measures involve gene technology, they may not be containable. For example the use of sprays to distribute gene technology can remove choice from the public.*

*Whilst the regulator will be required to seek public submissions, they are not obliged to act on them. It is hard to see any outcome for this position other than that of a biotech industry facilitator. In fact from Collin's public pronouncements, this seems to be an intent of the Bill*

*These are short answers to your questions. IMO the Bill is very poorly worded and too permissive. I refer you to my video on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5b2skQADT4&t=432s> which includes some references to recent cautionary public statements from highly qualified biotech insiders about safety. Also to the [HatchardReport.com](http://HatchardReport.com) where I have written extensively about the Bill. I am happy to talk to you by phone at 094372012.*

*FYI I was formerly Director of Natural Products at Genetic ID (now FoodChain ID). Genetic ID provided genetic testing and certification services to bulk food exporters like ADM and Cargill.*

*You introduced yourself as providing fact checking services for Meta. I understand from media reports that Meta is no longer requiring fact checking. Could you clarify your current role?*

*Best wishes*

*Guy*

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Let's hope we are not facing a renewed round of cancellation and government fawning from mainstream media on this topic. The cat is out of the bag on the Gene Technology Bill, the only people who will benefit seem to be domiciled in the state of Massachusetts, USA. New Zealand public health be damned.

For more information view our YouTube video "[The Gene Technology Bill. What Kiwis Need To Know](#)".

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