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GM vote 'a toxic guddle only the lawyers will win from'

Press Release from SNP MEPs Smith and Hudghton

The SNP team in the European Parliament **Alyn Smith MEP** and **Ian Hudghton MEP**, have slammed the passage of new EU legislation on the cultivation of GM crops as a "Trojan horse riddled with loopholes" which potentially opens the door to much greater use of GM crops and circulation of GM products in Europe.

The regulation, which was approved in the Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg today allows, on paper, member state governments to ban GM cultivation on their territory either on a series of objective grounds or through negotiation with the GM company. On paper, this should allow the Scottish government, given the current devolved UK arrangements, to implement a ban in Scotland even if England decides otherwise.

However even the pro-GM UK government has described this power as "questionable" so the Scottish power would be even weaker given we would be relying on the UK to defend it in the event of challenge. The Legal Services in the European Parliament and Council have also raised concerns over whether member state bans could withstand legal challenge.

The legislative intent is to remove objections from anti-GM Member States and to the fast-track authorisation of GM crops at EU level, as reported by the Guardian this morning who quoted the UK Government's head of GM policy as saying that "new applications should be approved much more quickly than has been the case until now."

Crucially, even assuming the power to prohibit GM cultivation in Scotland is watertight, the new law does nothing to prevent the free circulation of GM products into Scotland or even for adequate labelling of products containing GM material. It also has no provisions on preventing crops in GM-free Scotland from being contaminated by GM crops just across the border in England. The legislation only makes reference to anti-contamination measures on borders between Member States so there are no provisions on how to deal with a border within a member state.

It also does nothing to strengthen the environmental risk assessment of GM crop applications at EU level.

Alyn Smith MEP, the only Scottish representative on the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee,

said after the vote:

"The SNP have always taken a clear line that we do not support farmscale cultivation of GM crops in Scotland. We are of course in favour of carefully regulated research and development, but the GM industry has had the rest of the world to experiment in and the super-crop remains out of reach, so it is vital we safeguard Scotland's reputation for natural quality.

"This view reflects majority feeling on the subject, with a recent YouGov poll showing that only 20% think that the technology should be pursued in the UK at all. Scottish farming's appeal, particularly for exports, relies on a reputation for quality natural products and environmental sensitivity, and I don't want anything that may jeopardise that reputation, particularly as the long term environmental impacts of GMOs are still unclear.

"This is a dirty deal, designed to try and impose a technology which most European citizens don't want, and we will have no part of it. With so many issues glossed over or not addressed at all, only the lawyers will win from this toxic guddle."

Ian Hudghton MEP added:

"Although in theory this legislation would give the Scottish government the right to ban the cultivation of GM crops on our territory, we are unable to support it due to its much wider flaws. The Barroso Commission brought this proposal forward in 2010 with the implicit understanding that the right of Member States to ban cultivation on their territory should be traded for dropping their opposition to authorising GM crops at the EU level.

"Given the inadequacy of rules preventing contamination of non-GM crops and the continued free flow of GM products, I don't think it is credible if you oppose GM crops to imagine that we can somehow cut ourselves off as a GM-free island in a GM sea: if nothing else, it disregards the basic methods of pollination! We also needed to see far tougher rules on labelling of GM product and the package does not deal with this at all.

"We believe that it's more important to strengthen the EU-wide environmental risk assessment and authorisation process for GM crops, reflecting majority opinion among EU Member States against GM, as promised by President Juncker in his manifesto. As a single market for agricultural products, Europe should have a unified and common position against GM: this is more likely to withstand a legal challenge and complaints at the WTO."

ENDS

NOTE TO EDITORS

ALYN SMITH'S PREVIOUS STATEMENT ON THESE ISSUES WHEN VOTED IN THE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE IN 2011 IS BELOW:

<http://www.alynsmith.eu/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=869&cntnt01returnid=145>

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