

Gene Ethics Media Release, August 5, 2011

National Food Plan extension welcome: but Ludwig sidelines public input to the plan

Melbourne: 5/8/11: We thank Agriculture Minister Ludwig for an extension on the National Food Plan submission deadline. Comments due today can now be lodged by September 2.

"However, we are greatly disappointed that the Minister has broken Gillard government promises of transparency, fairness and public participation in development of the National Food Plan," says Gene Ethics Director, Bob Phelps.

"The discussion paper neglects any public processes in food policy issues, saying only: 'The government ... intends drawing upon ideas and suggestions to develop policy options for a national food plan, but not formally responding to specific submissions or issues.'

"This one-way process stifles debate, cherry-picks acceptable answers and will not deliver robust policies.

"Gene Ethics sought open public forums to discuss the sustainable farming and food production systems based on healthy soils that are needed to feed, house and clothe everyone well, in perpetuity.

"Instead, a program of invitation-only roundtable meetings run by CoxInall is scheduled, with just 15 invitees at each.

"Requests to participate, from a wide variety of public interest advocacy groups including Gene Ethics, were refused.

"The National Food Policy Advisory Working Group (see below), answering to the Minister, is composed of entrenched and powerful commercial interests which will not form the visionary plans for our food production and supply systems needed to feed our grandchildren and their children.

"With oil and phosphate reserves diminished and the global climate changing, we must quickly begin the transition from chemical and GM-based industrial agriculture to ecological farming systems.

"Food is the world's biggest industry and its captains are steering us into trouble," Mr Phelps concludes.

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National Food Policy Working Group

A National Food Policy Working Group has been established as a forum for active communication between the food industry and government to foster a common understanding of the industry's priorities, challenges and future outlook across the supply chain. The National Food Policy working group is one consultative mechanism to assist in developing the national food plan.

Members of the National Food Policy Working Group

- * Michael Luscombe - Managing Director and CEO Woolworths
- * Michael Byrne - CEO Linfox Logistics
- * Dr Alastair Robertson - Deputy Chief Executive of CSIRO
- * Terry O'Brien - Managing Director Simplot Australia
- * Simone Tully - Owner of OBE Organics
- * Jock Laurie - President National Farmers' Federation
- * Janine Allis - CEO Boost Juice
- * Kate Carnell - CEO Australian Food and Grocery Council
- * Malcolm Jackman - CEO Elders Ltd
- * Nick Stace - CEO Choice (Australian Consumers Association)
- * Alison Watkins - Managing Director and CEO Graincorp
- * Jeff Lawrence - ACTU Secretary
- * Dr Peter Williams - Associate Professor of Nutrition and Dietetics at University of Wollongong

<http://australian.foodsovereigntyalliance.org/blog/2011/08/04/need-help-with-your-national-food-plan-submission/>