

Green peer seeks to block new genetic engineering legislation



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A Green Party peer has accused the government of using a 'marketing slogan' to push genetically modified foods on the public 'by the back door'.

Natalie Bennett, former Green Party leader and now Green peer, says that the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill [1], which passed through the Commons and is in its final substantive stage in the Lords today, would allow genetically engineered foods to be marketed without labelling. A government consultation showed that 88% of the public and 65% of businesses were against the proposals.

Natalie is offering a last chance for the House to exclude animals from the Bill, or to exclude non-food plants and animals (like dogs and cats) from the Bill.

Natalie Bennett said:

"'Precision Breeding' is a marketing slogan, not a technical or legal term and has no place in the title of the Bill or future Act. It may sound clean and targeted, but look deeper and the dangers and potential unforeseen consequences of genetic modification are there. This is genetically engineered food by the back door, and with none of the labelling that allows consumers to make a choice.

"The science of gene editing is still far too uncertain and has been insufficiently considered or understood by the government, or adequately scrutinised by parliament. The public and businesses understand the risks better than the government – a majority showed overwhelming opposition to this dangerous legislation when the government consulted on the Bill.

"After detailed, substantive and critical debate earlier in the House of Lords, we've seen only extremely weak amendments put forward by Labour. My final attempt to offer the government a constructive way forward is to propose a process of deliberative democracy, to allow careful considerations of the issues that the parliamentary process has failed to address, including the labelling the public so clearly wants to see."

[1] <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3167>

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