

# Biodiversity Convention call to block new 'genetic extinction' GMOs

GMWatch & The Ecologist

6th December 2016

**160 global groups have called for a moratorium on new 'genetic extinction' technology at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity meeting in Cancun, Mexico. Gene drive technology, they say, poses serious and irreversible threats to biodiversity, national sovereignty, peace and food security.**

The CBD is the premier international treaty for protecting biodiversity and life on earth from new threats. It is within its mandate to adopt this moratorium, and countries that are party to it must act now to avoid serious or irreversible harm.

International conservation and environmental leaders from over 160 organisation are calling on governments at the 2016 COP13 of the Biodiversity Convention to [establish a moratorium](#) on the controversial genetic extinction technology called 'gene drives'.

Gene drives, developed through new gene-editing techniques, are designed to force a particular genetically engineered trait to spread through an entire wild population - potentially changing entire species or even causing deliberate extinctions.

The statement urges governments to put in place an urgent, global moratorium on the development and release of the new technology which, they say, poses *"serious and potentially irreversible threats to biodiversity, as well as national sovereignty, peace, and food security."*

Dr. Ricarda Steinbrecher, representing the Federation of German Scientists, said: *"It is essential that we pause, to allow the scientific community, local communities and society at large to debate and reflect. We can't allow ourselves to be led by a novel technique."*

*"We lack the knowledge and understanding to release gene drives into the environment - we don't even know what questions to ask. To deliberately drive a species to extinction has major ethical, social and environmental implications."*

*"Gene drives will be one of the fiercest debates at CBD this year", added Jim Thomas of ETC Group. "Gene drives are advancing far too quickly in the real world, and so far are unregulated. There are already hundreds of millions of dollars pouring into gene drive development, and even reckless proposals to release gene drives within next four years."*

### **Widespread scientific opposition to this hazardous technology**

In the lead up to COP 13, taking place this week from 4th to 17th December, German Minister for the Environment Barbara Hendricks wrote a [statement to NGOs](#) saying she would not support the release of gene drives into the environment, saying:

*"I share your concern that 'gene drives' can severely impact ecosystems, and believe that special precautions are needed in research and risk assessment. From an environmental point of view, I do not think that a release of organisms inheriting a 'gene drive' can be justified with our current level of knowledge."*

In September 2016, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) also [adopted a de facto moratorium](#) on the support or endorsement of research into gene drives for conservation or other purposes, supported by 71 governments and 355 NGOs (out of a total of 544 votes cast). The successful motion calls for the IUCN Director General and Commissions

*"with urgency to assess the implications of gene drives and related techniques and their potential impacts on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity as well as equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources, in order to develop IUCN guidance on this topic, while refraining from supporting or endorsing research, including field trials, into the use of gene drives for conservation or other purposes until this assessment has been undertaken."*

At the same time, 30 leading conservationists and environmentalists [called for a moratorium](#). And in June 2016, the US National Academy of Sciences released its report '[Gene Drives on the Horizon](#)', which explored the environmental and social concerns of gene drives, and warned against the environmental release of gene drives.

## **Massive global support for a moratorium**

Over 160 civil society organisations from six continents have joined the moratorium call. Among them are environmental organizations such as GMWatch, Friends of the Earth International and International Union of Food Workers, representing over 10 million workers in 127 countries.

*"These genetic extinction technologies are false solutions to our conservation challenges", said Dana Perls of Friends of the Earth. "We want to support truly sustainable and community driven conservation efforts. Gene drives could be co-opted by agribusiness and military interests. We need a moratorium on irreversible and irresponsible technologies such as gene drives."*

Supporters also include organizations representing millions of small-scale farmers around the world, such as Via Campesina International, the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements, the international indigenous peoples' organization Tebtebba, and Third World Network.

*"The CBD is the premier international treaty for protecting biodiversity and life on earth from new threats", said Lim Li Ching of Third World Network. "It is within the mandate of the CBD to adopt this moratorium, and countries that are party to this agreement must act now to avoid serious or irreversible harm."*

Scientist coalitions including European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility ([ENSSER](#)), Unión de Científicos Comprometidos con la Sociedad (Mexico) and ETC Group are also among the signatories.

*"Gene drives are basically a technology that aims for a targeted species to go extinct", said ecologist and entomologist Dr. Angelika Hilbeck, ENSSER president.*

*"While this may appear to some conservationist professionals to be a 'good' thing and a 'silver bullet' to handle complicated problems, there are high risks of unintended consequences that could be worse than the problems they are trying to fix."*

[http://www.theecologist.org/News/news\\_round\\_up/2988422/biodiversity\\_convention\\_call\\_to\\_block\\_new\\_genetic\\_extinction\\_gmos.html](http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_round_up/2988422/biodiversity_convention_call_to_block_new_genetic_extinction_gmos.html)