

TĀNGATA HUAWHENUA

MĀORI HORTICULTURE COUNCIL AOTEAROA

Tāngata Huawhenua Panui Summer 2025

Ngā mihi mahana ki a koutou katoa,

2024 presented significant challenges for our Māori horticulture community, most notably the devastating impact of Cyclone Gabrielle on key regions. The damage was unprecedented, yet our people demonstrated incredible resilience, quickly initiating recovery efforts. As we step into 2025, recovery is well underway, and the strength of our response is a testament to the determination and unity of our whānau. This pānui also focuses on the Gene Technology Bill and in advance we acknowledge Manu Caddie's efforts in leading this out for us.

Key Updates:

- **Export Growth:** With the government's focus on sustainability and innovation, Māori horticulture is poised to play a leading role in the projected \$8 billion export milestone for mid-2025.
- **Cyclone Gabrielle Recovery:** Despite extensive damage, recovery efforts have restored operations across most regions, and growers are showing strong progress toward full production levels.
- **Looking Forward:** Our Council will soon convene to finalise the 2025 work plan, which will focus on:
 - **Advocacy:** We need to strengthen our voice in policy discussions to support Māori horticultural growth and sustainability.
 - **Capability Building:** Offering governance and innovation workshops tailored for members.
 - **Strategic Opportunities:** Advancing initiatives such as bio-extracts and supporting land-use transitions for underutilized whenua Māori.

Protecting Whakapapa and Innovation: Our Voice on the Gene Technology Bill

Tāngata Huawhenua – Māori Horticulture Council Aotearoa has submitted a formal response to the Government's Gene Technology Bill, currently under review. This legislation aims to modernise New Zealand's rules on gene editing and genetic modification, with significant implications for Māori landowners, growers, and whānau across the motu.

As kaitiaki of our whenua and horticultural taonga, we recognise both the promise and the peril of these technologies. Our submission reflects a balanced position: embracing opportunity while safeguarding our tikanga, rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the integrity of our kai systems.

Opportunities for Māori in Horticulture

Gene editing has the potential to:

- Develop climate-resilient, pest-resistant crops that support Māori agribusiness.
- Enhance food security through higher yields and fewer chemical inputs.
- Create unique plant varieties with traits like enhanced nutrition or longer shelf life—opening premium global markets for Māori-grown produce.

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These opportunities could support intergenerational wealth creation and align with our drive for innovation, mana motuhake, and economic resilience on Māori-owned whenua.

Our Concerns and the Need for Tikanga-Based Safeguards

We also raise critical concerns:

- Whakapapa and cultural integrity could be disrupted by gene technologies, especially where taonga species are modified or used without proper consent.
- The Bill's mechanisms for recognising kaitiakitanga are weak and ill-defined, risking the erosion of Māori rights and responsibilities.
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi is not meaningfully upheld—especially in decisions involving indigenous species or mātauranga Māori.
- The Bill increases risks for organic and GMO-free producers, many of whom are Māori, and could undermine New Zealand's premium trade reputation.

We are particularly concerned that the Māori Advisory Committee's advice is not binding, even when taonga species are involved. This undermines the very notion of partnership.

Our Recommendations to Strengthen the Bill

Tāngata Huawhenua recommends:

- Making Māori Advisory Committee advice binding for applications involving taonga species.
- Requiring applicants to consult all relevant kaitiaki, not just those they choose to engage.
- Including species of significance to Māori—not just “indigenous species”—within oversight provisions.
- Strengthening protection for organic growers, and maintaining strict penalties for non-compliance.
- Investing in kaitiaki capability so Māori are resourced to engage in regulatory processes on equal footing.
- Retaining a precautionary, risk-based approach, prioritising both scientific integrity and mātauranga Māori.

He Kupu Whakamutunga

This Bill represents a turning point for how Aotearoa navigates emerging technology. For Māori, the stakes are high—our whenua, our kai, our taonga, and our tino rangatiratanga are all in play.

Tāngata Huawhenua stands firm: we are not anti-science. We are pro-tikanga. We are pro-kaitiakitanga. And we are ready to lead.

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Final Word

Acknowledgments: The resilience and innovation of our growers have set a strong foundation for future growth. As we navigate the year ahead, we are committed to ensuring that Māori horticulture continues to thrive, uphold our tikanga, and contribute significantly to Aotearoa's economy.

Ngā manaakitanga,

Ratahi Cross

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