

# Thousands fill Queen Street to march against GE



PHOTOS: CHARLOTTE WINSTONE

## Government lifts moratorium despite public protests

About 35,000 people marched up the main street of Auckland City on October 11 to voice their concerns over genetic engineering (GE). They were calling for an extension to the GE moratorium, which the Government has since lifted.

The protest, organised by Greenpeace, Mothers Against Genetic Engineering and the Auckland GE Free Coalition, was one of the biggest ever held in Auckland. The march began at the bottom of Queen

Street and continued up to Myers Park, where protesters were entertained by speakers and musicians. Similar protests also took place in Wellington, Christchurch, New Plymouth and Timaru.

The lifting of the moratorium means genetically modified plants and animals can now be farmed if official approval is granted.

Turn to the back page to read what veteran campaigner Laurie Ross has to say about GE.



# Scientists will publish information on animal testing

by Sarah Lang

Scientists are denying claims they are getting away with painful and unnecessary animal experiments, and say they will publish information to help the public understand their research.

Green MP and animal welfare spokesperson Sue Kedgley has put forward a private member's bill to tighten up and "lift the veil of secrecy" on animal research. She says experiments on live animals breach the basic values of a civilised society.

"Is it morally and ethically justifiable to knowingly inflict suffering on thousands of innocent animals when it is not for their benefit, and, if so, in what circumstances should animal experiments be allowed?"

Dr Martin Kennedy, senior research fellow at the University of Otago's Christchurch School of Medicine, defends experimentation on animals, saying anaesthetics and pain control are always used. Scientists carefully weigh up animal use against the benefits of testing, and are committed to looking for alternatives, he says.

"We are members of society and human beings, and we're principled in the way we operate."

The Alliance Against Vivisection (AAV) said in a report that New Zealand researchers do not have to use pain relief, look at alternatives to

animal testing or make sure experiments have not already been done.

The report said 260,000 animals were used last year for testing in areas such as medicine, agriculture, industry and teaching.

Almost 16,000 of these animals suffered severe pain.

The report was a joint effort from Save Animals From Exploitation, the Animal Rights Legal Advocacy Network, the National Anti-Vivisection Campaign and the Animal Rights Alliance, with input from independent scientists.

The AAV said some tests involved horrendous pain, such as cutting out sheep's intestines or inserting electrodes into rabbits' heads. It said some scientists were failing to look for alternatives to using animals and were conducting experiments that added nothing new to research.

The number of animals used in tests has been decreasing since the 1970s, says Dr Kennedy. Some 200,000 of the 260,000 animals used last year were not put in pain or killed.

Scientists and researchers responded to public concern over the use of animals at a conference in Christchurch. Other speakers included politicians, lawyers and representatives of the SPCA, MAF and animal ethics committees from across New Zealand and Australia.

The Australian and New Zealand

Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching (ANZCCART) ran the conference to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the system. Dr Kennedy, who was a co-convenor, says 80 to 90% of New Zealanders are concerned about animal use. Discussions at the conference looked into ways to reassure people that testing is done humanely and for the public good, he says.

The AAV report said many results of animal tests cannot be applied to humans, but Dr Kennedy says animal testing is absolutely necessary.

"What planet are people from who reject animal research? I cannot think of a single medical procedure that doesn't base itself on it."

Animal testing led to medical breakthroughs such as vaccines, antibiotics and insulin, he says, and aids understanding of diseases like cancer.

Wyn Hoadley, chairperson of the National Animal Ethics Advisory Committee, says care of animals in testing is hugely important.

"It is the responsibility of the researcher to take all steps to avoid or minimise pain and distress."

The committee holds workshops and puts out guides, such as A Culture of Care. To minimise animal use, testing in New Zealand is based on the "three Rs" - replacement, refinement and reduction.

But the AAV report called the New

Zealand system "shambolic" and said it was open to abuse by self-regulation, inadequate checks and balances, and a lack of monitoring and enforcement.

Most institutions were not aware of their legal requirements under the 1999 Animal Welfare Act, the report said. The act and its codes of ethical conduct were "blatantly inadequate".

Individual institutions or companies have animal ethics committees that set their own standards and policies. Information is available only through the Official Information Act.

The AAV said it found research institutions were hostile about giving out information. Requests under the act were met with confusion and delays, and animal use figures were inaccurate, false, confused or missing altogether.

The AAV said institutions could stack the committees with internal members, leading to potential bias and conflicts of interest. There is no requirement for public input and no penalties for breaches, the AAV said. Other countries have independent ethics committees or central licensing.

Ms Kedgley says the current system is designed to protect the sciences, and animal ethics committees need to be publicly accountable.

Dr Kennedy says animal ethics committees are doing their job as well as they can. They must have at least three independent members, he says.

He says some secrecy protects individual research and the safety of scientists, but details are always kept.

Speakers at the conference discussed the idea of a "veil of secrecy" around animal testing.

Dr Kennedy says the research community is now more aware of public concern and the need for more transparency.

ANZCCART says it will begin publishing summaries of animal research in plain language. The public will also be able to access balanced information on the value and need for animal research.

The proposal is "a welcome first step" towards introducing some transparency into animal experimentation, says Ms Kedgley.

"However, it does not go nearly far enough. Plain language summaries of animal research could be used to sanitise information and conceal relevant facts, such as the suffering animals had had to endure.

"We need to ensure that using plain language doesn't equate to censoring the facts."

Ms Kedgley said she wanted to see a website established to publish the research methods scientists used and information about how research applications were considered.

This information would be anonymous and published retrospectively to protect the identity and safety of scientists.