

Community Attitudes Towards Risk and New Technologies – A Case Study of Gene Technology

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There are many lessons that can be learnt from public attitude studies towards applications of gene technology, that are applicable to the introduction of other new technologies used in control of feral pests.

While previous research indicated that risk assessment of new technologies was based mainly on a risk vs. benefit analysis, the latest research indicates that this has changed. A major tracking study into public attitudes towards biotechnology and gene technology, conducted for the Federal Government agency Biotechnology Australia in May this year, found that there is an increasingly complex analysis of both processes and outcomes as well.

The public are increasingly interested to know who will benefit from the new technology - will it be the community or a company? And they want to know if the processes of development will be harmful to the environment or not. Products and processes that fail to prove community benefits over company profit, and fail to demonstrate environmental benefits over harm, are judged to be unethical.

For any new technology to be fully accepted by consumers, it must also meet a five-fold level of acceptance:

- Accurate information
- Community consultation
- Credible and effective regulation
- Consumer choice
- Consumer benefit.

This presentation also addresses studies into who are the most trusted and influential sources of information for the public, which could be used by a research agency to maximise the chances of successful communication being made and reaching maximum public acceptance of a feral pest control product or process.