



OIA25-0754

24 November 2025

Jon Muller
Secretary GE Free NZ
p.bleakley@orcon.net.nz

Dear Jon,

Thank you for your email of 24 October 2025 requesting information relating to illegal genetically enhanced petunias growing wild in Northland. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

You requested the following:

We have understood that there is an escape of illegal GE petunias growing wild in Northland. We would like to raise this as a biosecurity issue and ask that immediate removal of the illegal plants is undertaken. If Biosecurity MPI have already been notified of this and you are cleaning them up. Please could you advise us

- How did this event occur?
- How you have dealt with the problem, did you spray, autoclave ensure seeds were not spreading?
- How many plants have escaped into the wild?
- Whereabouts in Northland were the plants found?

You noted that these concerns arose from an article by Dr. William Rolleston in the *NZ Farmers Weekly*.

Based on the information available, the article in question appears to refer to a theoretical possibility that GE petunias could be growing in the wild, linked to the May 2017 response involving GE petunia imports.

The 2017 response determined that at least 61,000 seeds of the confirmed GM varieties had been imported into New Zealand and distributed nationally to the nursery industry and retailers. Spread was deemed to be mostly through nursery plant cultivation, and retail sales of seed and vegetative propagations. MPI worked with industry to trace and destroy all seed stock and unsold plants existing in New Zealand. Purchasers of the named varieties were advised to remove the plants from their garden and dispose of them in their domestic / household rubbish and dispose of any seeds or unplanted seedlings in the same way. They were advised to not dispose of plant material or seeds in compost or green waste.

Because petunia seeds lose viability quickly, few importers, if any, will order more than one season's supply at a time. A stocktake was requested and received from industry to determine what varieties were still held after the 2017/18 season, to ensure that no GM varieties had inadvertently been retained by industry.

This media release and the linked fact sheet contain further information about the detection and actions taken: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/news/media-releases/unauthorised-gm-petunias-may-be-in-new-zealand>

At present, there is no evidence to suggest that GE petunias are growing in the wild in Northland or elsewhere in New Zealand. In addition, MPI has not received any credible reports, observations, or leads indicating the presence of GE orange-flowered petunias in the Northland region that would warrant an incursion investigation or further biosecurity response.

I trust this information helps to address the concerns raised by you and members of your community.

Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with the Ministry for Primary Industries at Official.InformationAct@mpi.govt.nz. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143 or at info@ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'A. Spelman', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew Spelman
Commissioner Biosecurity Intelligence, Systems and Response