



OIA25-0789

2 December 2025

Claire Bleakley
claire@gefree.org.nz

Dear Claire,

Thank you for your email of 7 November 2025 requesting information relating to genetically modified petunias. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

You requested the following:

Please could you provide, under the Official Information Act, comprehensive documentation on all the correspondence between 24 October to the 7 November that the Senior Incursion Investigator of the Plant Health Incursion Investigation Team for Biosecurity New Zealand have had with Dr. William Rolleston regarding the GM petunias?

Please find attached as Appendix One email correspondence between the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) Senior Incursion Investigator and Dr. William Rolleston regarding the GM petunias.

These emails relate to an article that Dr Rolleston was quoted in that was published in the *NZ Farmers Weekly*. The article appears to refer to a theoretical possibility of GE petunias that could be growing wild in Northland, linked to the May 2017 response of GE petunia imports.

Some information has been withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA – *to protect the privacy of natural persons*.

In accordance with section 9(1) of the OIA, we have also considered countervailing public interest relating to the release of the information. We are satisfied that in this case, public interest considerations do not outweigh the withholding reasons outlined above.

As you may be aware, 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 black ink, reading 'Fleur Francois' in a cursive script.

Fleur Francois
Director Diagnostics, Readiness & Surveillance