

July 9, 2007

The Honourable Gary Lunn
Minister of Natural Resources
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Lunn,

It has come to the attention of the National Council of Women of Canada that, contrary to the intent of the International Convention on Biological Diversity, which Canada has signed and ratified, and specifically the Convention's "precautionary" approach, Canada is allowing research into the genetic modification of trees. This research appears to be in response to a rush to promote the use of trees as bio fuels and puts the protection of Canada's tree diversity at risk.

As early as 1988, NCWC recognized that, " Any depletion of the availability of primitive unprotected plant varieties will lead to a loss of genetic diversity and the possible extinction of natural immunities and regional ecological adaptabilities," and that the "preservation of genetic diversity is a crucial objective of the World Conservation Strategy." Our 1988 policy urged the government "to become a signatory to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations on the Universality of Plant Genetic Resources."

Later, in 1998, NCWC asked the government to "Develop and actively pursue a programme of constant surveillance of bio-systems in areas of natural resource exploitation to ensure preservation of the local biota as called for in Agenda 21, Chapter 15, Conservation of Biological Diversity, thus ensuring bio-security."

We note that, at its last meeting, the participants of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), which was set up under the International Convention on Biological Security, have "recognized the uncertainties related to potential environmental and socio-economic impacts, including long-term and trans boundary impacts of genetically modified trees, as well as the livelihoods of indigenous and local communities". As a result, they recommended that Parties to the Convention "take a precautionary approach when addressing the issue of genetically modified trees."

It is of significant concern to NCWC that Canada would allow the testing of genetically modified trees, given its ratification of the Convention and the risks such testing may well pose to the diversity of our Canadian forests, and their continued provision of suitable ecosystems for wildlife, and economic security for indigenous and local communities. This is certainly not evidence of the precautionary approach as advised by SBSTTA.

We would respectfully request that your Ministry look into this important issue and assure us that until the risks are assessed and it is proven to the satisfaction of the SBSTTA that genetically modified trees are not a risk to our forests and communities, that such testing will be halted.

Sincerely,

Karen Dempsey,
President NCWC

Text prepared by: Gracia Janes, NCWC VP Environment

cc: The Honourable Jack Layton
The Honourable Stéphane Dion
Mr. Gilles Duceppe

The National Council of Women of Canada is a federation comprised of Local Councils, Provincial Councils, and National Organizations. Founded in 1893, it was incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1914 and has been designated by the Government of Canada as being of national historic significance for its role in Canadian women's history. For more information, consult our web site at www.ncwc.ca or contact our national office at #205, 251 Bank Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 1X3.