PRESS RELEASE

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FEARS RISE OVER GMO DEADLINE

SNP Members of the European Parliament, Ian Hudghton and Neil MacCormick, are urging the Commission to back down on plans which could open the door to new GM product approvals across the EU. Their plea comes just days before the 17 October deadline for member states to implement Directive regulating the deliberate release into the environment of GMO's, expires (Directive 2001/18/EC). So far only one out of the 15 member states – Denmark – implemented the legislation, raising fears that new GM products could be approved without crucial biosafety regulations being in place throughout most of Europe.

In a letter to President Romano Prodi and his fellow Commissioners, members of the Greens/European Free Alliance coalition, of which the SNP are members, say that the Commission has a duty to refuse new approvals of genetically modified products under an existing moratorium, until all aspects of biosafety legislation have been concluded and implemented by all member states.

Ian Hudghton MEP explained the Group's position saying:

"We are fast approaching D-Day for GMO's. Just a few days from now the Directive setting out rules for the release of GM products is supposed to be in place throughout the EU. Clearly this is not the case, with most member states simply not ready and, with consumer reluctance towards GMO's on the increase. We believe that the Commission should permit the de-facto moratorium on new products to remain until such a time as proper controls are in place across all 15 member states.

The European Parliament is still working on a raft of legislative proposals dealing with labelling and traceability – issues of increasing importance to consumers who rightly demand accurate and detailed information on the food they eat. This legislation is unlikely to be in place at least until summer of next year furthering our case for the Commission to get its foot off the accelerator pedal on their rush to embrace GM technology.

The time has come for the Commission to stop being bullied by the biotech industry and to start listening to increasing public concerns about GMO's."

ENDS-

NOTE: Copy of letter follows

The Greens | European Free Alliance
in the European Parliament

President Romano Prodi
Commissioner Margot Wallström, Commissioner David Byrne, Commissioner Franz Fischler

Open letter 08/10/02

Dear President, Dear Commissioners

De facto moratorium on GMOs

It has been brought to our attention that the Commission is currently in the process of preparing a statement anouncing the end of the de-facto moratorium for GMO marketing applications, to be published around 17 October 2002, when the deadline for the implementation of Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release of GMOs into the environment expires.

While back in February of last year our Group welcomed the adoption of Directive 2001/18/EC, we always shared the view of those Member States which insisted that no new GMOs should be authorised for marketing before existing loopholes of the Union's biosafety framework have been closed. In fact, we were pleased to see that also the Commission seemed to share this view, as it stopped to insist on Council votes on marketing proposals.

Consequently, we are surprised by and concerned about the most recent statements of Commissioners Byrne and Wallstöm indicating that the approval procedure for commercial GMOs should be resumed on 17 October. These statements ignore the following aspects:

1. While Member States, the Commission and Parliament agree that a comprehensive traceability scheme, a new regulatory scheme for the authorisation and labelling of GM food and feed and a new set of rules for the export of GMOs to Non-Member States are urgently needed, no agreement has been achieved yet with regard to the scope or the modalities of these schemes. In fact, the proposed

regulations[1] might not be in force, let alone be operational before summer of next year.

2. So far only one Member State has transposed Directive 2001/18/EC into national legislation. There may be various reasons for this slow implementation process. However, one of the reasons certainly is that the Commission itself proposed in July of 2001, i.e. only 5 months after the adoption of the Directive, far-reaching and highly controversial amendments to the Directive. The Commission did not only propose the introduction of a threshold for the presence of unauthorised GMOs in food and feed products. The Commission also proposed dramatic and far-reaching changes to the marketing approval procedure for GMOs to be used as food or feed. In this situation Member States were left with two alternatives: either to amend within a very short period of time their national legislation twice or to wait and see. For obvious reasons, most Member States went for the latter alternative.

3. The Commission itself did not seem to pursue its own implementation tasks under the new Directive with great enthusiasm:
- The important guidelines on monitoring of GMOs, for example, were only recently adopted by the Council after the Commission had failed to secure a quailfied majority in the competent regulatory committee.
- No register for information on the genetic modification of commercial GMOs, as required by Art. 31.2 of the Directive, has been established yet.

4. Still unresolved is, finally, the question of liability for environmental damage caused by GMOs. Even though the proposed Directive addresses such damage at prima facie, the broad exceptions and the narrow definition of 'biodiversity' make it very unlikely that the proposed liability regime could ever cover any environmental damage, caused by GMOs. Similarly unresolved is the issue of GM contamination which is very likely to cause considerable economic damage to conventional and organic farmers if producers and users of GMOs are not required to take preventive measures to avoid contamination of other products.

In the light of these considerations, we would like to emphasize that it is pivotal that no GM products are approved until the Union's biosafety framework, including legislation on traceability, GM food/ feed, export of GMOs to Non-Member-States, environmental liability and GM contamination, is complete and actually in operation.

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[1] Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on genetically modified food and feed (COM(2001) 425); Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms and traceability of food and feed products produced from genetically modified organisms and amending Directive 2001/18/EC (COM(2001)182); Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the transboundary movements of GMOs (COM(2002) 85).

We therefore urge you to make very clear on 17 October 2002 that no GM products will be approved until the European Union and its Member States have completed a regulatory framework adequately addressing these issues and all necessary measures have been taken to control compliance with this framework.

Yours sincerely