



November 3, 2022

Julie Henderson
Director
California Department of Pesticide Regulation
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Urging Denial of Permit to Release Genetically Engineered Mosquitoes

Dear Director Henderson,

It has come to our attention that the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) is currently reviewing an application for a research authorization permit from the biotech company Oxitec for the first experimental release of billions of genetically engineered (GE) mosquitoes in Tulare County. As members of the Legislature representing significant numbers of Californians who could be affected by this decision, we are writing to express our opposition to this application. We believe that DPR should deny this research authorization permit because we have serious concerns about the safety, environmental effects and the ability to manage and contain genetically engineered mosquitoes. Significant scientific research is still needed to understand the potential public health and environmental concerns associated with the release of this novel insect prior to any approval.

It is our understanding that while the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) did approve the GE mosquitoes to be released in California, the agency did not conduct a thorough scientific review of the impacts of this insect on public health or the environment. California must require more and better information prior to any approval.

We believe that the U.S. EPA review process was incomplete and that it is premature for the state of California to consider the Oxitec application without more diligent federal review. There are many issues not addressed by U.S. EPA's review and there is insufficient data for the public to comment on the proposal or know its consequences.

Even after additional scientific research and EPA review we still believe that any application process for the use of genetically engineered mosquitoes should include a full CEQA analysis and a comprehensive review, in considering potential approval of a research authorization permit for a release in California. A comprehensive review process should:

- Establish robust regulatory structures for responsible assessment, monitoring and oversight of GE insects, per the National Academy of Science’s recommendations;¹
- Conduct a site-specific analysis for each site where release of the mosquitoes is proposed;
- Establish an independent scientific advisory panel of independent ecologists and entomologists, public health experts (including dengue fever and zika virus specialists), other key experts and public stakeholders to review the proposal and consider the potential environmental, health and social impacts of the release of GE insects;
- Require public review of the Florida field trial data ahead of DPR’s consideration of an approval; and
- Convene public meetings, at various times of the day and evening, across all potentially affected communities for public comment and discussion of the proposal with key independent experts present. Meetings should be available in Spanish as well as other languages predominantly spoken in the areas where releases are proposed.

Following such a comprehensive review, should DPR determine the release of GE mosquitoes does not pose public health or environmental risks, then the department may be able to move forward with a permitting process, including environmentally preferable alternatives and mitigation measures identified in the CEQA process.

The release of genetically engineered mosquitoes in California could be an experiment that, due to genetic spread, never ends and creates many unintended consequences. There are other more proven and less risky methods to control mosquitoes. Significant research and independent review are still needed before any application should be seriously considered. We appreciate that DPR has held one short comment period and intends to have a longer comment period for public comments later. We understand that DPR is working to get additional information, and that there is an intention to prioritize transparency and thorough analysis. We urge DPR to address the concerns raised in this letter, and to decline Oxitec’s current Research Authorization application.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. Should you have additional questions about this letter please contact Jim Metropulos in Assemblymember Friedman’s office:
jim.metropulos@asm.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



LAURA FRIEDMAN
Assemblymember, 43rd District

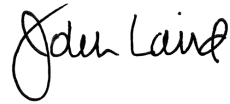


MONIQUE LIMÓN
Senator, 19th District

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2016. *Gene Drives on the Horizon: Advancing Science, Navigating Uncertainty, and Aligning Research with Public Values*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23405>



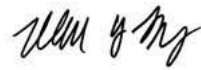
ASH KALRA
Assemblymember, 27th District



JOHN LAIRD
Senator, 17th District



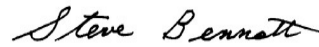
TASHA BOERNER HORVATH
Assemblymember, 76th District



PHILIP Y. TING
Assemblymember, 19th District



MARK STONE
Assemblymember, 29th District



STEVE BENNETT
Assemblymember, 37th District

cc: Yana Garcia, Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency
Christine Hironaka, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom