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For immediate release

Conflict of Interest in Biotechnology Regulations is Core Problem, says Institute

A report - The Regulation of Agricultural Biotechnology in Canada - was released today by The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP). The document is a comprehensive inventory of the gaps within the Canadian biotechnology regulatory framework.

Mark Winfield, co-author and CIELAP's Director of Research summarizes the Report's finding, by stating "the current state of the Canadian Biotech regulatory framework is both confused and inadequate." He went on to say "a fundamental difficulty of the Canadian Biotech regulatory approach is that it is built on a foundation riddled with conflict of interest. This is exhibited by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) having the contradictory roles of both promoter and regulator."

CIELAP's Executive Director Anne Mitchell said, "this report is a milestone in the Canadian biotech debate. It surveys the currently contentious state of biotech science, but focuses on enumerating the serious regulatory loopholes. CIELAP can only conclude there is inadequate protection of human health and the environment. Unless quickly addressed, these shortcomings could result in serious negative consequences for Canadian consumers."

"With few provisions for public participation, a poor institutional design (lead agencies having a mixture of promotional and regulatory roles), and significant weakening of the overarching statute (Canada Environmental Protection Act) it is difficult to believe that the public interest is being protected." Observed Sara Bjorkquist, CIELAP Project Officer and report co-author.

Mitchell concluded, "CIELAP's research indicates a serious situation exists. The minimal monitoring, few opportunities for public participation in decision making, and a Canadian Food Inspection Agency relying on legislation which provides no clear mandate or authority to protect human health, or biological diversity must be addressed immediately."

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The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy has for been commenting on and monitoring policy and regulatory changes related to the environment for 30 years.