

# Genetic Engineering, Gene Drives and Genome Editing: The Concurrent Dangers of “Home Gene Editing”

By [GMWatch](#)

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

*Nuffield Council on Bioethics finds materials to perform basic experiments are now available to “garage scientists”, but soft-pedals on better regulation*

The free short [version](#) of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics’ report on gene editing notes that there are “concerns” about “garage scientists” doing gene editing outside of regulated environments – see the article below.

But the report doesn’t contain any clear recommendations for stricter regulation that would, for example, restrict or ban sales of the home kits that are now available to buy on the internet. It only makes a lacklustre suggestion that “controls on access to certain materials, and policies for monitoring and recording research... may need to be enhanced”. In the conclusion it names “private experiments by community groups or individuals” as one of several “issues” that “should be kept under review”.

Clearly, if you need a licence to own a gun, you should have a licence to do gene editing. It shouldn’t be too hard to organise the necessary systems and it’s a way of governments making money.

The only reasons not to tighten regulation in this field appear to be that:

1. doing so could impact on the profits of companies that market gene editing kits
2. doing so would increase public alarm about the risks of gene editing at a time when the UK government wants to reassure people of the safety of the technology as applied to crops, livestock, and (increasingly) humans.

No doubt the second reason is viewed as more important than the first.

## Gene drives

The report soft-pedals on gene drives, a highly controversial technology that would enable the reduction or eradication of a wild species by permanently and irreversibly altering the genome in the lab. While it does mention “fears about unexpected or unintended consequences”, highlighted and more prominent on the page are several positive-sounding “potential applications”, including malaria control, wildlife conservation, and reintroduction of extinct species.

And the report doesn’t recommend a ban on gene drives; it only advocates that they should

be approached “with caution”.

### **Priority areas for ethical consideration**

The report recommends two priority areas which require urgent ethical consideration: human reproduction and livestock. Both could offer enormous economic opportunities for companies operating in this field.

Let’s hope that the Council does a proper job of looking at the serious problems with human germline (inheritable) genetic engineering and redesigning our livestock animals – as well as considering alternatives that don’t involve genetic tinkering.

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