

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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Western Australia (Incorporated)**

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The Pastoralists and Graziers Association of
Western Australia (Incorporated)

Submission to the
***Genetically
Modified Canola
Moratorium Review***





Review of the Moratorium on Genetically Modified Canola

Agricultural producers from across Australia are waiting for a break in the various state governments' moratoria on the planting of GM crops. The farmers of WA have a significant stake in the decisions made in Victoria, and elsewhere.

Once a single state recognises the benefits of allowing the commercial production of GM crops (other than cotton), the current government imposed bar to biotechnology-based productivity improvements will cease.

PGA Western Graingrowers

Western Graingrowers is a commodity association of the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia (PGA). Western Graingrowers represents professional growers operating at all levels of the cropping industry.

The PGA is mainly funded by our members' contributions which are voluntary.

PGA Western Graingrowers members grow well in excess of four million tonnes of various crops annually (mainly wheat, barley, canola and lupins). Like our counterparts in other states, we are broad-acre farmers with an export focus, who are quick to adopt the latest technologies in an effort to improve our productivity.

Drought, frost, weeds, and salt are key challenges to our production systems – challenges that have the potential to be addressed by various forms of biotechnology, including GM crops.

PGA Western Graingrowers have long supported an end to the state-based moratoria, and the ability of farmers to access crops approved by the OGTR. We believe that only by ending the moratoria will the industry be able to fully access the potential benefits of the new technology. **Only an end to the moratoria will create the combination of investment, commercial activity, basic research, plant breeding, and market development, necessary for Australian farmers to remain at the forefront of global agricultural productivity.**

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Australian agriculture is not losing the race – it is not even competing

Agriculture in Australia has relied on its ability to adapt, to innovate, and to increase its productivity in the face of challenging climatic and growing conditions.

Dryland broad-acre farming has been at the forefront of adopting new technology – and has been willing to spend significant research dollars on maintaining and improving farming systems. For example, the Grains Research and Development Commission (GRDC) has a budgeted income of over \$100 million, for the 2007-08 financial year. This represents a significant investment by the grains industry in trying to maintain and improve our domestic and international competitiveness – to produce what our consumers want, at the lowest possible costs.

Even though the GRDC has invested money in biotechnology, including GM crops, the existence of the moratoria – including that of Victoria – has been a significant disincentive for this activity.

Where we have seen various state governments put money into centres of excellence in medical biotechnology, agricultural biotechnology has stagnated under the moratoria. The lack of basic R&D funding flows through into the seed breeding and varietal commercialisation.

We have given our major competitors a significant head start in a crop like canola, and risk being left with an unviable industry.

The Myth of Market Access

The justification for the moratoria was, in part, the uncertainty surrounding consumer acceptance. Japan and Europe are cited as the most sensitive markets in this regard.

Evidence to Western Graingrowers from major commodity exporters (including CBH/GrainPool) reveals a lack of market premiums for non-GM commodities, with very limited exceptions.

Japan and Europe have both sourced canola oil originating from Canadian GM-canola in the past year.

Europe also has extensive plantings of GM-corn. Whilst this produce is being used for biofuels and/or animal feed at the present time, its existence, along with trials of other GM-crops, reveals that the claim that Europe will not accept GM-commodities is a myth.



Office of the Gene Technology Regulator

The State and Federal governments have agreed to a regulatory system based around the OGTR – widely recognised as one of the most thorough and professional regulators operating in the world.

We believe it is time to place trust in the skills and knowledge-base developed by the OGTR over the past few years.

The OGTR has approved only a very limited number of GM-crops for commercial production, and obviously has taken seriously its obligation to protect the health of humans and the environment. The moratoria undermine the sensible operation of the OGTR.

It is clear from their past performance that the OGTR will not allow a slew of novel GM varieties into production.

The varieties approved by the OGTR have extensive scientific material supporting their release, as well as trial evidence from within Australia. Most varieties approved by the OGTR have been grown extensively overseas – further highlighting the lack of potential risk from the end to the state moratoria.

Conclusion

Many growers in WA, and growers throughout Australia, wish to have the option of considering OGTR approved varieties in their cropping programs. At this time, this choice is limited to a few canola varieties with extensive cropping experience.

Growers in WA will not have the opportunity to comment on the WA moratorium for around a year.

PGA Western Graingrower members are hopeful that the Victoria review, and those occurring in NSW and SA, will remove the encumbrance of the moratoria.

Whilst WA grain growers will be regretful that they will not have an opportunity to adopt GM technology sooner, we are hopeful that Victoria will take a lead that we will rapidly follow.

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