

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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Name of Individual/Organisation: Focus on Food for health, healing and social justice

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To The Chair,

This letter concerns the review of GM canola in the light of the Victorian Government's Control of GM Crops Act 2004. I write as the Coordinator of *Focus On Food for health, healing and social justice*. Our membership includes those who suffer from or have concerns about fatal and debilitating diseases such as cancer, diabetes and food intolerances. We also have concerns about how foods are being used in unethical ways to manipulate or coerce defenseless communities.

We ask that the Regulations on the growing of GM crops due to expire 29 February 2008 be extended without amendment so that the moratorium continues.

The reasons for implementing the 2004 moratorium still exist, namely because of community discontent and that GM crops pose a threat to our state's economy, so the moratorium should be extended .

Also to be considered in the State's economics is the health costs to the community of food allergies especially in the growing prevalence and medical attention needed to care for childhood allergies. Anaphylaxis Australia records 400,000 Australians currently suffering allergic reactions, a high percentage are children. The GM industry has yet to show that the genetic manipulation of our food is not a contributing factor the these allergies. There is no monitoring of human health impacts. We do know that soya allergies skyrocketed by 50% after GM soybeans were imported to the UK.

(Townsend M (March 12, 1999) "Why Soy is a Hidden Destroyer." Daily Express)

There is growing scientific evidence linking GM animal feed and food to deaths and disease in laboratory animals, livestock and the human population. Speaking at the launch of his book "Genetic Roulette: the documented health risks of GM food" at a briefing on food safety and GMOs at the EU Parliament office in Dublin recently, the author Jeffrey M. Smith, described the evidence of health risks as "irrefutable", including new diseases, allergies, inflammatory responses, antibiotic resistance, reduced immunity, and pre-cancerous growths. Transgenic DNA in food can survive digestion and activate inside your body, potentially turning you into a living pesticide factory. A leaked European Commission document admits, "there is no unique, absolute, scientific cut-off threshold available to decide whether a GM product is safe or not".

It is up to the GM industry to show that this new radical genetic manipulation of our food is safe before releasing its products to the public.

Evidence of overseas market resistance to importing GM products is growing, not declining. (cf. www.gmwatch.org.au). European countries have a near-total market refusal of any food which carries the GM label (required by EU law if it contains or is derived from 0.9% or more of GM ingredients). This market refusal is now rapidly spreading to also exclude meat, poultry and dairy produce from livestock fed on GM ingredients (even though such produce does not yet require a GM label).

In January 2005, Greenpeace published the landmark report, "No market for GM labelled food in Europe", which details a virtual shut-down of the EU market for GM-labelled food. Europe's top 30 retailers and top 30 food and drink producers had by then already declared policies and non-GM commitments which revealed a massive international food and beverage industry rejection of GM produce. This cut across the industry from food and drink manufacturers to retailers, and includes everything from

snacks and ready meals to pet food and beer. The combined total food and drink sales of the 49 companies with a stated non-GM policy in their main market or throughout the EU (27 retailers and 22 food and drink producers) amounted to 646 billion, more than 60% of the total 1,069 billion EU food and drink sales in 2005.

Since then, Consumers International has called for a ban on all GM foods, and an EuroBarometer survey found that "Overall Europeans think that GM food should not be encouraged; GM food is widely seen as not being useful, as morally unacceptable and as a risk for society". Most leading EU retailers are now extending their GM bans to gradually exclude meat and dairy produce from GM-fed animals. See also evidence of buyer resistance to GM products among Australian consumers. (cf consumer survey by Greenpeace (www.greenpeace.org.au))

Because of our geographical isolation from potential contamination by wind-borne GM pollen, declaring the whole of Australia off limits to GM crops will clearly position our farm produce as one of the world's safe GM free food brands to capture the lucrative Japanese and EU export markets. This will boost the safety, quality, reputation and economic value of Australian produce providing a competitive advantage to our farmers and food producers for generations to come.

Issues of contamination and liability to farmers have not been resolved.

Large scale growing of GM crops, especially GM canola, by individual farmers in an under-regulated environment threatens the livelihood of non-GM farmers and our clean agricultural environment. This will not show our State government as 'progressive' eg. giving Victoria's virgin soils to huge multinationals who will lock farmers into contracts for patented GM seeds, chemicals and the entire growing system. The Canadian experience has shown that GE canola is impossible to control, as it has so contaminated conventional crops that canola is now listed as one of Canada's top 10 weeds.

The suggestion of co-existence of GM and non-GM crops is impossible, but promoted on purpose by those who want to undermine both conventional and organic systems of agriculture. Cross-contamination has already taken place with canola seed in Australia and it must be reversed, not facilitated by dropping the moratorium (cf. www.non-gm-farmers.com)

The fear that other States might change their GM policies is no reason for Victoria to make such a damaging and irreversible bad policy decision.

Promises of greater yields, disease resistance, salt tolerance, more nutritious foods have not eventuated. In fact, evidence shows that conventional breeding can deliver the same results and, even though it is slower, the process allows for proper monitoring over time to better assure results and safety. (Science in Society www.i-sis.org.uk.) Such research is done in the public arena, benefiting both farmers financially and law-makers in decision making.

The commercial, health and environmental risks associated with GM crops demand that a precautionary approach be implemented. Such an approach means that only an extension of the current ban on commercialization of GM crops is the appropriate action for this government to take.

FSANZ, our food 'watchdog' regulator must at all times *be and appear to be* without conflict of interest. Our organization suggests that the GE food approval process should be performed by independent testing (not testing by proponent biotec companies) and full comprehensive GM labeling of all food components be demanded. If GM food has been proven safe, it stands to reason that products should be labeled properly, enabling consumers the right to know and the right to choose.

We again insist that a Precautionary approach must be implemented on the growing of GM food crops until all the above concerns are resolved and that the current ban be extended without amendment after ~~the~~ Feb 2008, until at least 2013.

We thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns over this very serious decision .

Sincerely,



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