

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of the Moratorium on GM Canola

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Name of Individual/Organisation: Carlo Carli MP – Member for Brunswick

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Submission .

Review of the Moratorium on Genetically Modified Crops

Carlo Carli MP, Member for Brunswick

I believe that the conditions that prompted the 2004 decision by the Victorian Government to impose a moratorium on the commercial cultivation of GMO remain to this day. The risks of lifting the moratorium are greater than the risks associated with keeping it. For this reason, I am proposing that the moratorium be extended for at least another 4 years.

In assessing the economic impact of the moratorium on GM the question is whether the international competitiveness of Victorian agriculture is compromised if it loses its GM-free status.

Globally there is significant debate about whether genetic modification has been proven safe. Most countries in Europe, other including Japan and Mexico are not prepared to accept GMO food without assessing their safety themselves. This potentially establishes an import barrier and can threaten Victoria's reputation as a clean and green environment for agricultural goods.

There is no scientific consensus on the safety of GMOs. The **precautionary principle** states that if an action or policy might cause severe harm to the public, in the absence of a scientific consensus that harm would not ensue, the burden of proof falls on those who would advocate taking the action. The potential harm is both public safety and trade.

- Scientific uncertainty should not automatically preclude regulation of activities that pose a potential risk of significant harm (Non-Preclusion PP).
- Regulatory controls should incorporate a margin of safety; activities should be limited below the level at which no adverse effect has been observed or predicted (Margin of Safety PP).

- Activities that present an uncertain potential for significant harm should be subject to best technology available requirements to minimize the risk of harm unless the proponent of the activity shows that they present no appreciable risk of harm (BAT PP).
- Activities that present an uncertain potential for significant harm should be prohibited unless the proponent of the activity shows that it presents no appreciable risk of harm (Prohibitory PP).

Most countries in Europe, Japan, Mexico (among others) have taken the that genetic modification has not been proven safe, and therefore that they will not accept genetically modified food from the United States or any other country without assessing their safety themselves.

Our Clean/Green image

Australia is a major agricultural exporter and canola which is the GMO crop likely to be on trial is a major export product. The two biggest export markets for this commodity are Japan and the European Union (EU). Both of these markets are known to be particularly sensitive to GM products. The growth of the movements like Slow Food and tightening of import and other restrictions on GM foods in these markets demonstrate that public attitudes are moving decidedly against GM foods.

State governments across Australia are currently upholding bans on GM food crops. These bans are largely based on marketing grounds. It is without a doubt that lifting the moratorium on GM canola, or any other food crop, would potentially damage the 'clean/green' image of Australian produce.

The source of productivity gains

The productivity growth of Australian agriculture has been tremendous in recent decades. Grain industries, including canola, have particularly benefited. This Review ought to examine the source of this productivity growth and how it can be maintained. It is my view that technology and improvements in transport and other related infrastructure have been the drivers of productivity growth in this area. *It is important to stress that the causal link between the cultivation of GM crops and increases in productivity is weak.*

The steady growth of productivity in canola and other agricultural industries has been dependant on improvements in physical infrastructure (ports, roads etc.) and improvements in technology (both machinery and farming/land management knowledge)..

Victoria as a leader in biotechnology

Since 1999, the Victorian Government has invested \$1.8 billion into science, technology and innovation. This has resulted in Melbourne becoming the number one location for biotechnology in the Asia Pacific region. The city is home to world-class facilities like the Australian Synchrotron and the Australian Stem Cell Centre as well as internationally renowned institutes like the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute and the Howard Florey Institute. With the favourable policy settings that are currently in place, combined with significant public and private investment, this sector will continue to grow. Extending the moratorium on GM canola would not be detrimental to the growth of this sector.

Extending the moratorium- keeping our options open

The moratorium on GM canola provides a net benefit to the canola industry, related agricultural industries and in turns the Victorian economy. Public attitudes in Victoria, like those in the major canola export markets of Japan and the EU, are sensitive to GM products. This has been a source of our competitive advantage over exporters of GM canola, such as Canada. Australian canola is currently paid a premium over GMO canola from Canada and the US. It appears as though demand for 'clean/green' products will only increase. Maintaining GM-free canola will therefore ensure we retain this competitive advantage.

The risks in ending the moratorium on GM canola far exceed the risks in extending it.