



June 14, 2011

GTMC Secretariat
Department of Health and Ageing
MDP 138
GPO Box 9848
Canberra ACT 2609

Dear Sir/Madam,

Review of the Gene Technology Act 2000

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc.) (WAFarmers) thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the Review of the *Gene Technology Act 2000*.

As background, WAFarmers is the State's largest and most influential rural lobby and service organisation. WAFarmers represents approximately 4,000 Western Australian farmers from a range of primary industries including grain growers, meat and wool producers, horticulturalists, dairy farmers, commercial egg producers, pastoralists and beekeepers.

Collectively our members are major contributors to the \$5.5 billion gross value of production that agriculture in its various forms contributes annually to Western Australia's economy. Additionally, through differing forms of land tenure, our members own, control and capably manage many millions of hectares of the State's land mass and as such are responsible for maintaining the productive capacity and environmental well being of that land.

WAFarmers has had extensive involvement in representing its members in the areas of access to, and use of, biotechnology, and made a submission to the last review (in 1996) of the *Gene Technology Act 2000*. In that, as we do in this submission, WAFarmers outlined its support for the research, development and use of biotechnology within the national/state framework which is science based, and protects the health and safety of Australians and the Australian environment.

Australia currently does not have a nationally consistent scheme for gene technology regulation due to the vastly different approaches across its States and Territories.

Western Australia's *Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003* has as its purpose, 'to prohibit the cultivation of certain genetically modified crops in designated areas of the State and

to provide for their destruction in certain cases.' Effectively, the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003 acknowledges that the objects of the Gene Technology Act 2000 are being met, but despite this, has been used to restrict the evaluation and commercial planting of genetically modified crops.

In previous submissions on this issue, WAFarmers has commented on the need to identify "*the benefits of GM crops grown in Western Australian conditions thereby allowing farmers the opportunity of making informed decisions on whether GM technology will deliver benefits to their farming enterprises. Quite simply, if the technology does not produce an economic return and the produce is not acceptable to markets, farmers will not grow it. Farmers should however, be given the opportunity of making informed decisions on the technology which can only be facilitated by the performance of GM crops under Western Australian conditions.*"

WAFarmers believes this access is critical, given the broad scale acceptance and increased use (year on year) internationally of GM technology in a range of crops. On a value basis, over 70 per cent of Western Australia's agrifood produce is exported annually. Australia is a small but important part of global agricultural production and therefore, investment in product development, as opposed to evaluation, may not be specific to our farming practices and environment.

To encourage locally based research, development and evaluation of biotechnology that will ensure interest from research partnerships, Western Australia's and indeed wider than that, Australian farmers, deserve greater consistency and clarity in the state/national legislative and policy interface, as to ensure they remain competitive, these farmers require access to the science-based innovation used by our market-competitors internationally.

In summary, WAFarmers believes that the global use of biotechnology will continue resulting in greater and more diverse plantings of GM based crops. Whilst GM is often treated as a 'new or emerging' issue in Australia, the reality is our international competitors have over 15 years of experience in the production, handling and marketing of GM crops. WAFarmers believes that the *Gene Technology Act 2000* establishes a science-based, rigorous, transparent gene technology regulatory system however the development of a nationally consistent scheme is lacking and subject to state-based GM marketing moratoriums or legislation.

WAFarmers thanks you for your consideration of this submission. Should you wish to further discuss the issues raised in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact myself or WAFarmers Director of Policy, Alan Hill on 9486 2100.

Yours sincerely



Mike Norton
President