



AusBiotech's Response to the Select Committee on the Moratorium on the Cultivation of Genetically Modified Crops in South Australia

To: Anthony Beasley
Secretary to the Committee,
Select Committee on Moratorium on the Cultivation of Genetically Modified Crops in South Australia
Parliament House
North Terrace
Adelaide SA 5000
18 October 2018

From: AusBiotech Ltd
ABN 87 006 509 726
Level 4, 627 Chapel St
South Yarra VIC 3141
Telephone: +61 3 9828 1400
Website: www.ausbiotech.org

AusBiotech is pleased to provide this submission to the Select Committee on the Moratorium on the Cultivation of Genetically Modified Crops in South Australia. As the industry organisation representing the biotechnology industry in Australia, the AusBiotech membership includes a number of agricultural organisations. AusBiotech represents the interests of agricultural biotechnology companies and advocates for policy positions that deliver benefit across the whole of the industry.

This submission reflects the consolidated feedback provided by AusBiotech's AusAg & Foodtech Advisory Committee. It also takes account of and is in broad agreement with the recommendations of the collaborating organisations CropLife and the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (ATSE).

Key Points:

- a) The measures outlined in the moratorium have not reliably been shown to result in the proposed benefits to the South Australian State, industries or people.
- b) The moratorium has not had a significant positive impact for South Australian industry from a marketing perspective, either nationally or internationally, when compared to other states.
- c) By restricting the implementation of new agricultural technologies, the moratorium has potentially compromised South Australia's competitiveness from a crop yield perspective and restricted the potential benefits of reducing chemical use and environmental impact, including fuel consumption.
- d) There has been no clear demonstration of any positive effects of restricting GMO use in terms of soil health or other environmental effects.
- e) The moratorium has failed to demonstrate clear benefits in terms of reducing the impact of contamination compared to other states that have successfully embraced new technology alongside traditional methods.
- f) The moratorium risks compromising investment and adoption of innovative agricultural technologies in South Australia, thereby adversely impacting competitiveness and jobs.
- g) There is an opportunity for Government to create of an environment that encourages and supports investment and drives adoption of technologies which will benefit industry and communities and help maintain South Australia's competitiveness and leadership in food and wine production.
- h) AusBiotech would like to see a nationally consistent regulatory scheme for gene technology, with minimal variation at state level in terms of adoption and regulation of GM crops.
- i) AusBiotech supports the principle that all regulation should be commensurate with the associated risk, cost and benefit to the community.
- j) AusBiotech supports the position that GMOs approved by the Gene Technology Regulator have been demonstrated to be safe and that GM crops have economical (reducing costs and improving productivity/efficiency) and environmental (reducing emissions and pesticide use) benefits.
- k) AusBiotech supports the position that all valid agricultural production systems should have an equal opportunity to contribute to the agriculture and food production system under free market conditions and should be permitted to co-exist in a responsible manner.
- l) AusBiotech supports the need for state government to manage the potential future cultivation of GM crops in a responsible manner and in line with community expectations. As proposed by CropLife, we fully endorse a 'stepwise approach' to a possible repeal of the Genetically Modified Crops Management Act 2004 (SA).

AusBiotech supports specific amendments to remove restrictions on transportation of GM material through South Australia, as these have unintended implications for movement of material between states and potentially internationally.

Commentary:

In relation to accessing and adopting technological innovations that will continue to support the growth and sustainability of agriculture in South Australia, the current moratorium poses a number of questions for the South Australian agricultural industry and Government.

For South Australia to maintain its leadership in agriculture, especially in food and wine production, it needs sustained investment in technological innovation, including agricultural biotechnology. In its absence, agriculture will surely suffer if it cannot capture the benefits of investing in agricultural innovation. The moratorium has created an environment that discourages this investment and sends the wrong messages to those working on the development of the innovations that are beneficial for South Australian agriculture, and even to those considering embarking on related careers.

It is an inherent right for South Australian farmers and supply chains to make choices from technologies that are available in other states of Australia and to its competitors internationally. Currently, with regard to innovations in agricultural biotechnology, this right does not exist.

For example, in June 2004, CSIRO and the GRDC joined forces to establish the Crop Biofactories Initiative (CBI), an innovative programme with a 12-year timeframe. The aim of the \$15 million investment was to establish and develop a commercially viable plant-based industrial oils industry by 2020. The industry is based on the introduction of new high value oilseed crops, which could be adopted by farmers throughout the grain growing regions of Australia, including South Australia.

From this initiative, two new high value crops have been released. The first is a canola crop, which can produce Omega-3 oil and meal for use in a range of high value areas, including food production and as a feed for the seafood industry. The second crop is super high oleic safflower that produces an oil that will be targeted for use in the high value oleo chemical industry, where it will replace current sources of oleic oil, such as environmentally sensitive palm oil. The oil will be used for products such as lubricants, transformer oils, cosmetics and medical uses.

Under the current moratorium, even though South Australian farmers have contributed to the development of these two crops through the levies they have paid to GRDC, they are unable to benefit from these crops in their crop rotations due to the current status of the moratorium. In the case of the super high oleic safflower, the irony is that the home of safflower in Australia has been the south-east of South Australia.

Within the context of the current review of the moratorium, two alternate questions and outcomes must be considered:

- 1. Is the South Australian Government prepared to let investment in agriculture innovation and its adoption by farmers continue to slip away and lead to a further decline in the value of agriculture to the South Australian economy, including employment and education? Or**
- 2. Can the South Australian Government create an environment where its policies encourage and support investment in the development and adoption of innovative technologies (including agricultural biotechnology) that will be beneficial to all agricultural producers and the broader community, as well as maintaining South Australia's leadership in food and wine production?**

The future of innovation and sustainability is a long-term strategy. The path forward for investment in innovation in South Australian agriculture will require sustained focus and effort together with the flexibility to adapt and adopt emerging best practices. To remain internationally competitive and meet the potential for growth through to 2030, will depend on the South Australian Government

adopting policies that embrace innovation, engage investment and bring new technology, such as agricultural biotechnology, to market in a timely manner, that allows a realisation of the intended benefits of that investment for all South Australians.