

Submission to the 2017 Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Review of the National Gene Technology Scheme.

We make this submission in the hope that you will consider the significant industry implications of gene technology and will evenly and fairly consider the impact it has upon consumers and our products.

Introduction

Ceres Natural Foods is one of the leading national manufacturers of organic and natural foods. Established in 1979 we are an Australian made and Australian owned company and have been at the forefront of the Australian organic food industry since we began.

We are concerned by the weak existing framework around the labelling of gene technology in food products, and especially concerned that the Review might in any way further erode the ability for our customers to identify the absence of gene technology in the foods we sell relative to other food products in the market.

It is vitally important that our customers have confidence in our products and their ingredients. Our customers consistently remind us that they are deeply concerned by the practices by which their food ingredients have been grown, and we believe that the National Gene Technology Scheme should act to strengthen transparency in this regard.

Specific comments

Gene Technology Definition

Ceres Natural Foods is concerned by any potential weakening to the conception of what is and isn't Gene Technology. We are in favour of the definition being broad and articulate. We particularly see the necessity for the definition to be an on-going one that captures new gene editing techniques and the like.

State GM Crop Bans

We are in favour of states retaining the ability to institute GM crop bans to protect their markets. Our organic products rely on strong protections for organic crops and farmers, and given the current weak protections in place state based GM bans are vital to ensuring the health of the industry.

GM Labelling

GM labelling was introduced in Australia to enable consumers to have freedom of choice. It is supported by the overwhelming majority of Australians.

Australian consumers have a very strong desire to have complete transparency around the ingredients, origin and processes which go in to products they purchase. In many regards these desires are supported, through things such as the Food Standards Code and the recent Country of Origin requirements.

However, when it comes to GM labelling we believe the current system is inadequate. Consumers desire transparency and all GM ingredients should be required to be labelled as such. Australian products are specifically lacking in this regard compared to European standards.

Organics

We believe there should be stronger protections for traditional and organic farmers at risk of GM crop contamination.

It does not make sense that the costs and risk of gene technology could be unfairly borne by innocent third parties. GM biotech companies and partners should be held strictly liable for the risks borne by their products.