



Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

POLICY STATEMENT

Gene Technology and Primary Industry in Tasmania

Preferred Outcome

Tasmanian farmers rely on a diversity of activities to sustain commercial viability in a competitive environment. Individual farm enterprises must be able to access the widest possible range of land use options to maximise profitability. Gene Technology is a rapidly developing and potentially highly productive tool for farmers to that end. Tasmanian farmers must be allowed to benefit from gene technology to the maximum extent possible.

Background

The TFGA recognises that the introduction of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's) into Tasmanian agriculture is a contentious issue among members.

On the one hand we have members who see substantial commercial advantage in taking up available GMO options now, and foresee even more benefits in future from second and third generation genetic improvements. On the other we have members who foresee possible loss of important markets for non-GM product, if they cannot guarantee GMO free status in deliveries because of the difficulty of managing cross contamination between different product streams.

Important considerations here are:

- As far as possible individual primary producers must be able to choose for themselves what products they produce and what technology they use to that end. Farmers must have the choice to access all available technologies so that they can remain competitive in domestic and global market-places.
- As far as possible primary producers must be able to choose what markets they sell in to and how they manage their marketing.
- Government regulation of farming must be minimised, and focus on setting reasonable rules with regard to impact of farming practice on others in the community, and the environment, rather than specifying process.

- Government needs to be careful in the extent to which it invokes the “precautionary principle”¹ as a basis for preventing adoption of new technology in primary industry, by comparison with working to resolve problems which occur as and when they arise, including reversing out of a problematic situation.
- As far as possible existing common law processes and remedies should be the underpinning basis for addressing disputes between individuals with regard to impact of the affairs of one on those of others.

The TFGA arrived at the following position after considerable research and extended consultation across our internal committee structures, a public forum and members workshop. It was very apparent that the majority view did not support the maintenance of an indefinite blanket moratorium on GMO in Tasmania.

Our Position

- A vital role for the Tasmanian Government is to continue to support efforts of the Tasmanian agricultural sector to realise its full potential in terms of diverse, profitable and sustainable local industries. This includes active support to industry to explore the potential benefits of new technologies.
- As part of this role, it is legitimate for the Tasmanian Government to consider market implications for the wider industry associated with adoption of new technologies by any part of it.
- Gene Technology represents a major opportunity for the Tasmanian agricultural sector to achieve medium and long term growth and efficiency gains.
- The current blanket Tasmanian Government moratorium on the use of GMO in Tasmania is not the best policy in the circumstances, because its very nature prevents any meaningful exploration of possibilities to develop Gene Technology for the benefit of Tasmania's agricultural industries.
- Systematic case-by-case consideration of GMO is the most appropriate way for Government to approach this issue. Key issues for Government in this regard are human and environmental safety, field containment of plants and plant material, and market implications.
 - The key determinant of whether a GMO is allowed into Tasmania should be whether it has sign-off by the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR), with regard to human and environmental safety, and Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ), with regard to domestic food standards requirements.

¹ **Note:** Australia's Inter-Governmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE) notes that “Essentially, the precautionary principle offers administrators advice about how to act responsibly in the face of uncertainty and lack of full scientific knowledge. Under this Principle, policy makers are advised to use great care when authorising resource use where the outcomes of that use cannot be predicted with confidence, where one or more of the possible outcomes could have extremely adverse implications for future generations, or where no known substitutes exist for the resource being used”.

- The Tasmanian Government has an important role in decisions relating to field containment, but this should be restricted to specifying the containment standards.
 - A benefit-cost analysis should be applied before making a decision on marketing grounds. Product and market strategy is for individual enterprises or industry segments to decide. The Tasmanian Government's role should be to assess, in conjunction with industry, whether individual proposals to introduce a GMO threaten the markets of the agricultural industry as a whole, and the likely significance of any threat.
- An important role of the Tasmanian Government is the active encouragement of local Research & Development into GM opportunities.
 - Existing common law processes and remedies should be the underpinning basis for addressing disputes between individuals with regard to GMO related issues.

[ENDS]