

# Genetically Modified Crops



## Isobel Redmond and the State Liberals

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Science is playing an increasingly vital role in maintaining food supplies across the world. Population growth is being compounded by a contingent loss of arable land and shifts in climate patterns are denying traditional food growing regions their normal rainfall.

In 2005, global production of Genetically Modified (GM) canola of 4.7 million hectares equated to about 18% of the total global canola crop. As at 2008, Canada, the USA, Chile and Australia are the only countries to produce commercial GM crops.

In 2003 the Australian Office of the Gene Technology Regulator concluded that two GM canola varieties were as safe for human health and the environment as conventional canola.

Conventionally-bred herbicide tolerant (HT) canola, introduced into Australia in 1994, was estimated in 2004-05 to comprise 80-90% of WA's canola crop and 30-40% of canola across other Australian states.<sup>1</sup>

The value of combined GM & non GM oilseed exports, largely canola, was in excess of \$640 million in 2008-09.<sup>2</sup> This has quadrupled since 2006-07 due in some part to the opening of a huge European market, which applies rigorous standards to imports that Australian produce is able to meet.

While all major markets require some level of certification about GM products, none currently exclude it. Research suggests that Australia stands to benefit significantly from more widespread introduction of GM crops.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to safeguard Australia's reputation for clean, green, quality produce. However, the State Liberals also understand that food production efficiency must increase in order to remain competitive. Advances in agricultural science will be pivotal to that increase.

The debate over Genetically Modified crops continues. Labor States and the Federal Government are slowly endorsing GM products and many favour national introduction. The Federal Government approved a licence for the growing of GM canola in November 2007 (cotton and some other varieties were previously licensed) and commercial production had begun in Victoria and NSW by 2008 and will commence in WA from 2010.

Many in the community are confident the introduction of GM elsewhere in Australia is inevitable.

If this is true, we might be better served by working with the technology to ensure it remains safe and productive in the future.

<sup>1</sup> Herbicide tolerant crops – the facts, 2008, <http://www.biotechnology.gov.au>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Commodity Statistics 2009, ABARE

<sup>3</sup> GM oilseed crops and the Australian oilseed industry, Bureau of Rural Sciences, 2007



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## A State Liberal Government will

Support the moratorium on GM, while continuing to –

Closely monitor progress in other states where GM technology is being trialed or applied. This will enable us to-

- Model the benefits of remaining GM free;
- Allow informed and appropriate decisions on whether to continue the general ban on GM crops in SA or to allow their introduction under strict management controls;
- Examine the effects on existing crop markets;
- Monitor world trends in take-up and application of new technologies;
- Monitor niche markets for non-GM canola – value and access; and
- Monitor segregation in storages of GM canola with non-GM canola.

## GM food labelling

The State Liberals' believe building awareness about the existing applications and use of GM technology used in the delivery of products already on the shelf is vital to stimulating informed debate on this topic.

This will help consumers understand the extent to which GM technology is already present in food products and, additionally, allow them to make informed purchase decisions.

Specifically, there are different groups of crops that utilise genetic modification technology, those -

- Whose production is altered but with an end product identical to a conventional variety;
- Whose end product contains improved nutritional content;
- That provide a particular health benefit through an ingestible vaccine; and
- That assist in managing the effects of climate change.

## A State Liberal Government will

- Lobby the federal government to incorporate into its food labelling program a requirement that the use of GM technology in the production or processing of goods is noted on the label. (For further detail on Labelling see 'Food' – policies.)
- Investigate the efficacy of a multi-tiered labelling system to define which food is which and support customer choice.