

SUBMISSION

Senate Select Committee on Australia's Food Processing Sector

27th September 2011

For further information, please contact:

Jeremy Tager
Manager, Political and Projects Unit
Greenpeace Australia Pacific
GPO Box 1917
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Ph: 6257 6516
Email: jeremy.tager@greenpeace.org

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to input into the inquiry into Australia's food processing sector.

Greenpeace would like to bring to the committee's attention the genetically modified wheat commercialisation program currently under way in Australia. This program is being carried out by biotechnology corporations, in partnership with Government bodies including the CSIRO, to develop and commercialise genetically modified wheat, as early as 2015 (1).

Threat to Australia's wheat industry

Greenpeace submits that the GM wheat commercialisation program is a serious threat to Australia's \$4.7 billion export wheat industry.

Once released into the field, GM crops cannot be kept segregated from conventional crops. Experience shows that contamination is inevitable (2). If GM wheat is allowed to be commercialised in Australia, it will contaminate the nation's conventional wheat crop. As a result, Australian wheat will be rejected by consumers, at home and abroad.

~~GM wheat has been rejected by consumers around the world, and for this reason GM wheat has been rejected by all other major wheat growing nations. The Canadian Wheat~~

Board blocked GM wheat commercialisation, with one director explaining that GM wheat had “the potential to virtually destroy the \$3.5 billion industry in Western Canada.”(3)

Consumers in Australia have consistently indicated that they don't want to eat GM foods. GM wheat would be in multiple processed foods should it be commercialised, including bread, pasta and baby foods. In many cases it would have to be labelled – virtually ensuring public rejection. In cases where the foods would not have to be labelled – due to Australia's inadequate labelling laws – the public's overwhelming support for GM labelling would be ignored.

To date, no government or wheat industry body in Australia has considered the impacts that GM wheat commercialisation would have on the nation's wheat industry.

Threat to public health

The CSIRO has announced that products made from GM wheat grown under commercialisation trials will be tested on humans(4). This will be the first testing of GM wheat on humans anywhere in the world, and yet there is very little public information available on the parameters and precautions of the testing regime. What is known is that the testing will not look for adverse or unexpected effects of the wheat. Greenpeace attempted to acquire information on the human testing regime from CSIRO through a request under the Freedom of Information Act, but was rejected due to CSIRO's commercial activity exemption under that Act.

GM wheat is being commercialised in Australia without any studies into the potential health impacts. What little independent research that has been done on the health impacts of GM food show alarming and unexpected results. Tests on rats have resulted in kidney and liver malfunction(5) and allergic reaction(6).

Recommendations

Greenpeace recommends that the Committee make the following recommendations to the Australian Government:

- Stop the commercial trials of GM wheat in Australia.
- Establish an independent wheat industry regulator to guide wheat sector development.
- Stop the release of GM wheat into the environment or the market.
- Stop the testing of GM products on humans.

References

1. CSIRO "GM wheat trial, OGTR application DIR092" Food Futures Flagship <http://www.csiro.au/files/files/pr3v.pdf> (accessed 4 July 2011)
2. Details of 29 reported incidents of contamination and 169 breaches of security licenses issued by the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) are recorded. See OGTR Annual and Quarterly Reports under the Gene Technology Act 2000, published at <http://www.ogtr.gov.au/internet/ogtr/publishing.nsf/Content/reports-1>
3. Ian McCreary, a farmer and a director with the Canadian Wheat Board; "Wheat board and Monsanto duel over GM wheat" CBC Digital Archives, Broadcast Date: Oct. 13, 2003 <http://archives.cbc.ca/lifestyle/food/clips/10957/> (accessed 7 June 2011)
4. OGTR (2009) DIR 093 Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan, <http://www.ogtr.gov.au/internet/ogtr/publishing.nsf/Content/dir093> (accessed 7 June 2011)
5. de Vendômois JS, Roullier F, Cellier D, Séralini (2009) "GM. A Comparison of the Effects of Three GM Corn Varieties on Mammalian Health" *Int J Biol Sci*; 5:706-726. <http://www.biolsci.org/v05p0706.htm> (accessed 7 June 2011)
6. Prescott VE, Campbell PM, Moore A and others (2005). "Transgenic expression of bean alpha-amylase inhibitor in peas results in altered structure and immunogenicity" *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* 53(23):9023-9030