Submission Summary

Australia needs to embrace the use of genetic technology to enable the farming community to be internationally competitive and generate a sustainable advantage.

The new plant varieties developed by genetic technology will only be accepted in the marketplace where there exits both the economic advantage and social benefit to the individual farmer and the Australian consumer.

A persisting obstacle to the acceptance of the new plant varieties is the disinformation provided to the community by professional agitators. This issue needs to be decisively eradicated.

The global agricultural community endorses mechanisms to increase the efficient of food production to satisfy emerging food quality requirements and growing populations. Australia cannot afford to ignore these international directives without penalty.

New food biotechnology applications produce crops which utilise less water, produce more food per unit area and resist pests and disease. These crops may be cultivate in land which is subject to high salinity, heavy metal contamination, cold, drought, flooding and low nutrient.

Genetically modified food organisms and their food derivative will be extremely important to the Australian economy in the next few decades as the technology and commercialisation are improved. The Australian government must foster an environment to capture the benefits of the emerging technology and demonstrate international leadership.

Future value and Importance of genetically modified varieties

The application of genetic technology will lead to a significant change to outcomes in farming. The outcomes are evidenced by sustainable and rapid delivery of a potentially more nutritious product to the consumer at a reduced cost.

Food researchers to help develop innovations that will create marketable foods and increase food supplies. The improved understanding of biotechnology is expected to lead to cleaner or more sustainable manufacturing process.

Biotechnology may result in foods which contain more calories; destroy toxins; disease resistant crops; crops that thrive despite drought and salty soils.

Economic success in the competitive international market demands that food production is efficient and profitable.

Intellectual Property is a powerful tool which provides far reaching monopoly rights. I submit that the Australian farming community is in a prime position to become a beneficial recipient of genetic technology due to farming management factors which have been developed over the last few decades:

(i) Australia's high quality and efficient farming production methods are applauded internationally

(ii) acceptance of new farming techniques and benefits of traditional and emerging breeding technology

The ability for producers to compete using traditionally available varieties

The genetically modified varieties will only be competitive if the price of the seed is cheaper than the current biotechnology produced derivative and the product is cheaper to produce.

The public demand for 'fast food and availability on demand' will lead to rapid dominance of these products only to be counterbalanced with the community perception of genetically modified varieties in the food chain.

If the cost to utilise these varieties is uncompetitive, market forces will lead to their downfall !

It should be noted that the so called 'plant genetic transformation' will not occur overnight, nor within a period of a year. Traditional varieties will continue to be available for the short term and will compete until the first set of genetically modified varieties are sold and repeat orders are made by the public.

The commercialisation and marketing of agricultural and livestock production varieties

Australian companies should be obtain 'reward incentives' to develop varieties by way of internationally competitive funding and taxation.

Although the Australian seed industry is small, there is a prime window of opportunity to develop varieties in the next decade, especially with plants which are not 'targeted' by the multinationals.

Australia is renowned for its intellectual capacity. Now, the research industry needs to channel, though co-ordinated government funding and taxation assistance, research and development to develop a position of international market strength.

The cost to producers of new varieties

The market place will dictate the perceived benefits of the new varieties. The committee should note that existing plant varieties are currently sold pursuant to licensing and remuneration arrangements. The perception of benefit will be derived both from productivity gains as well as community acceptance of these products. The community perception will be an important criteria that the plant rights holders will need to include in any costing.

The appropriateness of current variety protection rights, administrative arrangements and legislation, in relation to genetically modified organisms

I submit that the Plant Breeders Rights legislation provides an adequate framework to protect seed growers.

The *Plant Breeders Rights Act* 1994 (Cth) defines the exceptions to the plant breeder's rights. The rights are removed for specific exceptions mainly on countervailing public interest grounds. The combined effect of sections 14, 16 and 18 are designed to ameliorate the ability of the rights holder to unduly restrict the distribution and sale of the harvested material. This legislation promotes private investment and results in a more genetically diverse varieties of seeds.

Plant breeders are entitled to a reasonable reward for their work and the rights will lead to a better access to varieties bred overseas. The best safeguard against the risk of 'genetic wipe out' is a dynamic plant breeding industry.

The *Patents Act* 1990 (Cth) and the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) also provides adequate protection for the development of plant technology.

The Standing Committee should also become aware of the outstanding achievements of the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee (GMAC) which have crystallised to the recent announcement in the Federal Budget for the Gene Technology Office.

The GMAC produces Public Information Sheets on Deliberate Release Proposals which includes the following information: organisation conducting the research, location, scale, expected date of release, brief summary of the aim and nature of the release, genetic modification and effect, procedures for release and other agencies advised by GMAC.

In addition, the publication of guidelines such as the *Guidelines for Activities with the Potential for Unintended Release of Genetically Manipulated Organisms* which discuss the importation, inter alia, of bulk quantities of genetically manipulated seeds.