

**IN CONFIDENCE**

Meeting with Mr Jeremy Tager and § 11C(1) Greenpeace  
2:00pm, 3 November 2010

**KEY ISSUES**

1. On 27 October 2010 Greenpeace released a report on *Spliced Bread: the Threat of Genetically Engineered Wheat in Australia*. Amongst other things Greenpeace claim Australian wheat research has been taken over by multinationals; and that Australian wheat growers will lose market share by surrendering their non-genetically modified (GM) status. Previously Greenpeace has also cited concerns with adequacy of Australia's GM regulatory and food labelling systems; environmental impacts of GM crops including GM monocultures, loss of market access; impact on organic crop production; and legal liability to farmers of non-genetically modified crops.
2. In late September 2010 Greenpeace and the media also reported trace amounts of GM soy and corn had been found in S-26 Soy infant formula, despite the product not being labelled as containing GM ingredients. Wyeth Nutrition, the manufacturer of the formula, released a statement that any contamination was adventitious as the company has a policy of not using GM ingredients. We understand from media reports the GM content levels found in the formula were well below the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code trigger of 1 per cent before labelling is required
3. Australia has a rigorous national framework for managing and regulating GM crops and food, which requires careful assessment of human health and environmental risks. This framework operates at three levels: GM crops are not released to farmers unless they have been assessed as safe for human health and the environment; GM foods are not approved for sale unless they have been assessed as safe; and those foods must be labelled in accordance with requirements of the Australian and New Zealand Food Standards Code to allow consumers to make an informed choice.

**DESIRED OUTCOME [OPTIONAL]**

- N/A

**TALKING POINTS**

- The Australian Government recognise that there continues to be some level of concern in the community on a range of issues relating to genetically modified (GM) crops and food, and that there needs to be well-informed public debate on these issues.
- Australia has a rigorous national framework for managing and regulating GM crops and food, which requires careful assessment of human health and environmental risks. This framework operates at three levels: GM crops are not released to farmers unless they have been assessed as safe for human health and the environment; GM foods are not approved for sale unless they have been assessed as safe; and those foods must be labelled in accordance with requirements of the Australian and New Zealand Food Standards Code to allow consumers to make an informed choice.
- The Government considers that GM can play an important part in dealing with emerging challenges – particularly those arising from climate change and pressure on global food supplies.
- Importantly, GM crops can also benefit the environment by changing the way farmers manage their crops; for example through reduced usage of pesticides and adapting to lower water availability. GM canola suits minimum tillage and no till cultivation methods, allowing farmers save fuel and money, save time, and preserve soil moisture. These benefits are likely to be increasingly important because of climate change.
- If our farmers are to increase productivity and remain competitive in international markets, Australian farmers must have the ability to choose whether to adopt new technologies.
- Australia must position itself to benefit from the opportunities offered by this technology while still providing consumers with a range of products from which to choose.

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## MEDIA OPPORTUNITY

- N/A

## SENSITIVITY [IF ANY]

Medium. There continues to be some level of concern in the community on a range of issues relating to genetically modified (GM) crops and food. Following the reports trace amounts of GM soy and corn had been found in S-26 Soy infant formula, Senator Siewert and Senator Xenophon moved to discuss the labelling of GM foods when the Senate next sits.

## PORTFOLIO ACHIEVEMENTS IN [STATE OR TERRITORY]

- N/A

## ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: The process by which genetically modified organisms and genetically modified foods are determined to be safe.

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**GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS AND FOOD]****KEY ISSUE**

- The regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and GM food in Australia is achieved through an integrated legislative framework which includes the Gene Technology Regulator and Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). (Refer Attachment A).
- The intentional release of a GMO into the Australian environment, such as a GM crop, must be licensed by the Gene Technology Regulator, an independent statutory office holder within the Health portfolio. The license will only be issued if risks can be managed so as to protect the health and safety of people and the environment.
- The Regulator has approved the commercial release of several varieties of cotton, canola, carnations and a rose; and has issued licences for field trials of crops as diverse as sugarcane, wheat and barley, pineapple, white clover and grapevines and the ornamental plant, torenia.
- In 2010, nearly 133,330 hectares of GM canola was planted in Australia. This is the third year GM canola can be grown commercially in New South Wales (24,040 hectares) and Victoria (36,500 hectares). It is the first year GM canola can be grown commercially in Western Australia (72,790 hectares). This represents around 8 per cent of the total canola crop in Australia.
- All GM foods intended for sale in Australia are subject to a pre-market safety assessment by FSANZ. GM foods cannot enter the food supply unless they have been assessed as safe for sale for human consumption by FSANZ. To allow consumers to make an informed choice, food derived from GM crops must be labelled as GM if any genetic material and/or protein other than that normally present in the food is contained in the final product. More than 40 GM foods have been approved to date.
- In May 2009, nine grains organisations from Australia, Canada and the United States issued a joint statement indicating their intention to work toward the synchronised commercialisation of GM wheat. While their intention may be aimed at minimising market disruptions, any GM crop that is going to be commercialised in Australia must first be assessed and licensed by the Gene Technology Regulator. Markets must then be identified for the product for it to be viable.
- Field trials are underway in Australia for GM wheat. Industry has stated it will be at least seven years before GM wheat is commercialised in Australia.
- Decisions on whether to allow GM crop production in part or all of a state or territory are a matter for that jurisdiction.
- Before issuing a licence to deal with a GMO, the Gene Technology Regulator prepares a risk assessment and a risk management plan in relation to the dealing proposed to be authorised by the licence. The risk of the formation of a monoculture in natural environments is investigated as part of this risk assessment process.
- The Australian grains industry believes it is possible to keep non-GM grains separate from GM grains throughout the supply chain in Australia. Industry is using buffer zones to assist with segregation of GM and non-GM crops, and has produced guidelines for clean-down of harvesting equipment.
- Farmers make commercial decisions, including to operate organically or to grow non GM or GM crops.
- Monsanto has stated (in its submission to the NSW review of GM crop moratorium legislation) that it has never been, nor will it be, Monsanto's policy to exercise its patent rights where trace amounts of patented traits are present in farmers' fields as a result of inadvertent means.
- In the well-known case of Monsanto against Canadian farmer Percy Schmeiser, Monsanto sued because it believed the defendant took active steps to cultivate its GM variety without permission.