



Organic Industries

A voice for Australia's organic industries



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Trade issues ignored

Organic industry protests deregulation of gene technology

The organic industry is urging the Senate to overturn the Government's deregulation of gene technology. Instead, the Government should consider a proper risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis.

"We need to be much more cautious about these new technologies" said Dalene Wray, Acting Chair of Organic Industries of Australia. "The Court of Justice of the European Union has already ruled that crops created using these new gene-editing technologies are regulated as GMOs and subject to the same high hurdles for developing GM crops for food. China is in a similar position. Why would Australia want to be out of step with its major export markets?"

The Government wants to exclude a class of genetic modification from any scrutiny by the Office of Gene Technology Regulation. In China, Europe and other markets, it is clear that SDN1 and CRISPR-CAS9 technology does not comply with their organic standards.

"With the Government's deregulation, Australian organic product may no longer be certified as organic in those and other premium export markets. Up to \$680 million in exports of organic produce is at risk", said Ms Wray.

However, the longer term opportunity cost is potentially higher, with the organic industry and its exports still growing at a rapid rate.

"The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator may have assessed this issue on a scientific and health basis, but it has paid insufficient consideration to the market impact for the organic industry", according to Ms Wray. "Many in the farming community are concerned that they're going to lose access to export markets and the government hasn't allayed those concerns. Some of our most important export markets could be closed to Australian organic exporters".

The organic industry is also concerned about the right of Australian consumers to be informed. "Consumers want to make an informed choice whether to consume GM products. Australian consumers have a right to know," said Ms Wray

The organic industry implores all Senators to support the disallowance motion from Senator Rice.

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Background

The issue

The *Gene Technology Act 2000* currently requires all scientific and commercial activities using genetic modification processes and living products to be notified to the Office of Gene Technology Regulator for assessment and licensing.

The Government's changes to the *Gene Technology Regulations* will exclude a class of methods known as SDN1 from any notification or scrutiny at all. The regulations will become law on 8th October 2019, unless the Senate disallows them, and Australia will become one of the first countries in the world to deregulate the use of these new genetic modification techniques.

How does this affect the organic industry?

Under the new regulations, nearly three decades of work by thousands of farmers is under threat because many GMOs (as defined by our export markets) will no longer be registered, regulated or labelled in Australia, hampering traceability and making organic status almost impossible to verify in Australia.

Australian organic exports rely on our produce meeting the organic standards as set by the importing countries. In China, Europe and other markets, SDN1 and CRISPR–CAS9 technology does not comply with those standards. With the Government's deregulation, Australian organic product may no longer be certified as organic in those and other premium export markets.

We consider that the Government has not adequately considered the trade implications for organic products.

Some of our most important export markets could be closed to Australian organic exporters.

Organic Industries of Australia

OIA Ltd (website) is the interim peak body representing all Australian organic operators, regardless of which certifier provides their organic certification. Our members include some of Australia's largest organic certifiers, producers and exporters, including Bellamy's Organic, NASAA Organic, OBE Organic, Hancock Agriculture, Paris Creek Farms, Rural Organics, Queen, Norco Foods, Rosnay Organics, Australian Organic Meats, Primal Foods Group, and Pure Harvest.

OIA Ltd was founded after the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources led a process of preliminary discussions with the organic industry over the period of September – December 2016. This tested the waters on the interest of the industry in working together to increase the competitiveness of the Australian organics sector.

During 2017 and 2018, the Australian Organic Industry Working Group (AOIWG) was formed and developed a roadmap to improve the representation of Australia's organic industry. The AOIWG consisted of industry leaders from across Australia collaborating on establishing a harmonised national voice for all organic producers, certifiers and the supply chain.

In an expression of unity at the Love Organic symposium (14&15 February 2018 in Canberra), Australia's organic industries agreed to establish a new peak body that is the voice for Australia's organic industries in regard to policy and market access and OIA Ltd was born.