

# Media release



## FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

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### **FARMERS AND CONSUMERS GIVEN CHOICE ON GM CANOLA**

Victorian farmers will be given choice over what type of canola crop they will grow, when a four-year moratorium on genetically modified canola lapses in February next year, the Premier, John Brumby, announced today.

Mr Brumby said the State Government had accepted Federal Government approvals and the findings of a report led by Sir Gustav Nossal giving the all-clear for GM canola.

“This decision will not only put Victorian farmers on a level playing field with overseas farmers, it would also deliver significant environmental benefits,” Mr Brumby said.

“Victorian farmers will now have the choice to grow the type of canola they want, enabling them to compete equally with overseas farmers for the first time.

“If farmers believe the market and environmental benefits exist, they will be able to grow GM canola. Victoria, acting today together with New South Wales, will now join countries like Canada and the United States in giving farmers greater choice on canola.

“More than 22 countries and 10 million farmers around the world grow GM crops.

“Our farmers will now have the choice whether to grow GM or non-GM canola, subject to tough Commonwealth, State and industry safeguards.”

Mr Brumby said genetically modified hardier forms of canola would result in less tillage – and therefore less soil erosion – as well as less use of pesticides.

“GM canola will have a positive environmental impact. GM cotton grown in Australia has produced its own natural insecticide, resulting in a 75 per cent reduction in pesticide applications,” Mr Brumby said.

Mr Brumby thanked Victoria's Chief Scientist Sir Gustav Nossal and his panel for their work in investigating the economic impact of GM canola and said the Government had accepted the recommendations of the panel report.

"This panel was set up after the Federal Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator approved the safety of several varieties of genetically modified canola," he said.

"The panel investigated the economic risks and benefits of either retaining the moratorium or allowing it to lapse."

The Minister for Agriculture Joe Helper said the Victorian Government established a moratorium on genetically modified canola in May 2004, following the Commonwealth's approval of canola varieties for use in 2003.

"As the report notes, more and more representative and commercial bodies from across the spectrum have been further reassured by the science and the safeguards around GM canola since the moratorium was established in 2004," Mr Helper said.

Supporters of growing GM canola in Victoria include: Victorian Farmers Federation, Australian Grains Council, Australian Dairy Industry Council, Australian Oilseeds Federation, ABB Grain, Australian Food and Grocery Council, Birchip Cropping Group, CropLife Australia and GrainCorp..

"As more and more countries have approved GM canola, the economic opportunities have opened up and the risks diminished," Mr Helper said.

"Victoria contributes a quarter of Australia's food exports worth \$5.75 billion, making up 23.7 per cent of Australia's total agricultural production and it's essential that we continue building on our strong record.

"Responsible action on GM canola will not only protect our current markets, but will also equip our farmers to compete on a level playing field for more lucrative canola exports.

"Economic analysis by ACIL for the review found that allowing the moratorium to expire would generate up to \$115 million for the Victorian economy over the next eight years."

Mr Helper said consumers would still have clear choice about whether to buy GM or non-GM canola products, and clear labelling to guide that choice.

"Consumers will continue to be able to choose to purchase GM, non-GM and organic products, with GM products labelled under the national standards," Mr Helper said.

Mr Helper said the Commonwealth had found that approved strains of GM canola could be grown and harvested safely, without affecting other crops, because the industry has a proven track record of keeping various grades of grains separated throughout the supply chain.

“Sir Gustav’s review further assured farmers who choose to grow non-GM canola that the Victorian industry could achieve effective separation of GM and non-GM canola,” he said.

“Imported foods made using these canola varieties are already available in Victorian supermarkets - our farmers will now be able to grow them, like their international competitors, if they choose.”

The Victorian Government appointed to assess the moratorium Victoria’s Chief Scientist Sir Gustav Nossal, former Chair of the Victorian Catchment Management Council; Christine Forster and Southern Regional Panel for Grains Research and Development Corporation Merna Curnow in May 2007.

The independent panel considered more than 1200 submissions and sought to investigate the economic risks and benefits of either retaining the moratorium or allowing it to expire.

GM canola will be available for the 2008 planting season.

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