

24/4/2019

Submission to Tasmanian GMO Review 2019

On February 19th of this year, I had an article published in the Mercury newspaper in which I said “I believe that Tasmania has a unique charm that we must vigorously protect”. That charm certainly does not include GMO foodstuffs. A large part of Tasmania’s charm is our clean green image which is significantly linked to our GE Free status, our hormone growth-promotant-free beef, and our fruit fly free and fox free status. We must fight hard to retain all of these attributes as part of the Tasmanian Brand.

Tasmania is distinct from other parts of the world and even other states of Australia in that we benefit from global demand of our agricultural produce, food, wine, whisky, gin, chocolates, cheeses and beers, as well as a high value, growing tourism destination with visitors hungry for our “CHARM”.

Be it Mona, Dark MoFo, The Wooden Boat Festival, Salamanca Market, Farm Gate Market, Harvest Market, Cradle Coast Farmers Market, Burnie Farmers Market, Taste the North West, The Tulip Festival, Willie Smiths Apple Festival, Festivale, The Taste, Cygnet Folk Festival, The Wall, Derby, Maydena, Wild Mersey Mountain Bike, Pennicott Wilderness Journeys, Bruny Island Cheese, Lark Distillery, House of Anvers, Port Authur, Cradle Mountain, Freycinet, Three Capes, Mount Field, Gordon River Cruises, ABT Railway or the high quality food and wine – all are based on charm embedded in authenticity and nature and together attract some 1.3 million tourists. Tourism has become Tasmania’s most important economic driver with the Hobart Airport recently announcing a \$200m investment to accommodate the rise of visitor numbers. People are not coming for Genetically Modified crops, I would suggest.

As the Owner of a Unique Tasmanian Chocolate business, Rhuby, I have recently made a decision to start implementing GE Free into my brand through social media, packaging and storytelling as I change my marketing material. This decision has been encouraged through discussions with consumers and possible export markets who have asked if my products contain any genetically modified ingredients. I am regularly also asked if I am Organic to which I reply “no, but I am authentic”. My products are free of all artificial colourings, flavourings and preservatives. I grow my own rhubarb and use no chemicals, herbicides, or artificial fertilisers and I urge people to come and see the frogs and ladybirds in my rhubarb as evidence of my authenticity.

I strongly object to lifting the current GE Ban as it would severely inhibit my market advantage of being Authentic.

Global consumers with disposable income are educated and are seeking safe and untampered food; and it is a rapidly growing market. Tasmania cannot compete with low margin, high volume and low input-cost agricultural production countries. Instead we need to focus on high value, differentiated products aimed at higher value markets. Organic and low chemical input production with GM Free status provides us with an enviable global market position that is sustainable *and* commercially

viable – we cannot win a race to the bottom given the size of our economy, land mass and population.

In 2014 the global sales of Organics totalled \$80 billion USD and by 2017 this figure had grown to \$97 billion USD. Tasmania's total agricultural production in 2017 was only around \$1.2 billion and this included wool, hay and nurseries.

This data shows that Tasmania's total agricultural production is less than 2% of the current world demand for organics alone. Tasmania is already moving from chemical-based agriculture to natural farming practices as has been seen at Westerway Raspberry Farm. Australia's largest private berry grower is using minimal chemical inputs and working with nature in its berry production. Owner Richard Clark has granted permission to reference him in this submission as a supporter of the GM Moratorium.

In the past couple of years there has also been a rapid conversion of conventional dairy farms to organic production with around 10 conversions to organic either complete or underway. One of these farmers, Kevin Francombe of Mt Hicks, informed me that their operation is achieving close to a 30% premium for their milk over conventional dairy operations. Kevin said that the GE Moratorium was very important for Tasmania and the growth of the organics industry.

The transition to organics is ahead of the current statistics. It will be another year or so before this trend is documented in primary production data.

To abolish the GE Moratorium would dramatically and adversely impact the current trend within Tasmania to organic conversions and low-chemical food production. It would have negative flow-on effects to those wineries and brewers that are choosing natural brewing processes and businesses such as my chocolate business that is building its own brand on being healthy, free of artificial inputs and untampered. I encourage sales on the basis of the Tasmanian clean green image, the Brand Tasmania Logo and by being Authentic.

“Global increases in the area of certified organic farmland and production volumes are not keeping up with global demand, signalling the potential for even greater growth for Australian producers, processors and handlers”. Source: DPIPWE

Tasmania's Department of Primary Industries' figures state that the farm gate value of agriculture is currently around \$148 million with a multiplier factor of three once it leaves the farm gate. These figures are expected to grow over the coming years as the demand for our clean green food products continues to increase. We must be vigilant in protecting this valuable industry and the marketing potential that comes from a GE Free status.

The proponents of abolishing the GM Free moratorium should examine what happened to Tasmanian international exports in the past year or so, when the fruit fly outbreak brought us back to par with our mainland counterparts. The fruit fly incursion demonstrated the export markets' value of our brand and their ability to go elsewhere if requirements are not met. I have endeavoured to source Government data to quantify my case but it seems very elusive. I would urge the panel to request this information from Government or private enterprise to substantiate my claims on the economic cost to exports due to the fruit fly incursion.

The benefits of a GMO Free claim are far more important to global markets than growing GMO products. Contrary to what the pro-GMO lobbyists promote, I believe there are only small production gains for the growers and disproportionately large benefits to the multinational corporations behind the GMO products.

By the time that these submissions are digested by the assessment panel there will be about three weeks until the results of the federal election are known. I am certain we will see more voters turning to minor parties and independents as a result of our major parties being driven by the big end of town at the expense of ordinary citizens. I hope that is not the case with this review.

Malcolm Ryan