

A ten year moratorium

The Tasmanian Government has a target to grow the farm gate value of agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050, underpinned by a comprehensive Agri-Food Plan that will capitalise on Tasmania's competitive strengths to create jobs and sustainably grow the sector.

Tasmania's GMO-free status currently supports food producers to leverage the State's competitive strengths in agriculture, that is, rich soil, favourable climate, abundant water, biosecurity, innovative businesses and premium brands.

The Tasmanian Government will maintain a moratorium on the release of GMOs into the Tasmanian environment for ten years until November 2029.

There will continue to be regular reviews of developments in gene technology, markets and consumer sentiment, which can trigger a review of the position earlier should developments warrant it.

This Policy will be reviewed before November 2029 and a decision made on whether to further extend or amend the moratorium.

Framework

The importation, use and development of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in Tasmania, along with any other dealings, are regulated by laws at both Commonwealth and State levels.

At the Commonwealth level, Tasmania participates in the National Gene Technology Scheme, which governs matters relating to the human health, safety and environmental impacts of GMOs. The Scheme provides a uniform system to regulate the development and use of gene technology in Australia.

The Tasmanian Government will continue to exercise its rights and meet its obligations under the National Gene Technology Scheme through the *Gene Technology (Tasmania) Act 2012*, which implements the Scheme in Tasmania.

Under the Scheme, States can regulate dealings with GMOs for marketing purposes. Tasmania has since 2001 maintained a moratorium on the commercial release of GMOs into the Tasmanian environment.

The Tasmanian *Genetically Modified Organisms Control Act (2004)* ("the Act") provides the basis for the moratorium and regulates dealings with GMOs for 'marketing purposes'.

This Policy and the Tasmanian Gene Technology Guidelines ("the Guidelines") describe the dealings that may be authorised under the Tasmanian Genetically Modified Organisms Control Act (2004). The Guidelines also provide the operational details on how this policy will be implemented by the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE), as the lead agency on GMO policy for primary industries in Tasmania. The Policy and Guidelines may be amended by the Tasmanian Cabinet.

Monitoring and review

GMOs may provide opportunities to enhance the competitiveness of the State's agricultural sector. However, the potential use of GMOs requires careful consideration to ensure there are no negative impacts on markets or on the State's brand.

A full review of this Policy will be undertaken before November 2029 to inform a decision on whether to further extend or amend the GMO moratorium prior to its expiry.

DPIPWE will implement evidence-based GMO monitoring and review to continuously assess developments in gene technology during the period of the moratorium, including emerging technologies, policy changes, consumer sentiment and market and branding implications.

At least every three years DPIPWE will provide a report to the Minister on developments in gene technology and market changes. Specific matters to be reported include:

- consumer sentiment in important current and potential future markets;
- new gene technologies that provide positive benefits to primary industry sectors and Tasmania as a whole; and
- development of new generation GMOs that provide health or other benefits.

DPIPWE will advise the Minister if, based on evidence, there are significant developments in these areas that warrant triggering an earlier review of this Policy before the maximum ten years.

The Minister can also direct a full review of the Policy at any stage during the period of the moratorium if developments warrant it.

The Tasmanian Government will strive to ensure that measures to safeguard Tasmania's GMO-free status remain appropriate to a changing risk environment, particularly as more GMOs are adopted in international and national jurisdictions and in markets that supply products to Tasmanian primary industries.

DPIPWE will also monitor the risks associated with maintaining Tasmania's current GMO threshold levels and any alternative options.

Pharmaceutical poppies

The Government is maintaining the existing policy, held since 2009, that allows for the use of GMOs in pharmaceutical poppies not intended for use for food or feed, provided all statutory requirements are met and that markets for Tasmania's GMO-free food products can be maintained and appropriate co-existence arrangements developed.

In anticipation of the pharmaceutical poppy industry investing in research and development (R&D), DPIPWE will work with the industry and key stakeholders on co-existence strategies for managing any potential risks associated with Genetically Modified (GM) non-food pharmaceutical poppies.

Other GM plants and animals

It is the Government's intention that all GM plants (other than non-food pharmaceuticals) and GM animals remain prohibited, except for gene technology used in Physical Containment Facilities for applications such as research for, or production of, human medicines or therapeutics, closed loop industrial processes and animal feeds with non-viable GMO material.

The Government also wants to encourage biotechnology research innovation in Tasmania. The Government also supports research into other GMOs in Tasmania in Physical Containment Facilities provided all statutory requirements are met.

Conventional Research and Development

The Tasmanian Government recognises the importance of research to primary industries in this State and acknowledges the tremendous capacity for innovation amongst local scientists, technical service providers and primary producers.

The Government is committed to better aligning research and development activities to improve productivity and industry competitiveness. Tasmania has the potential to be best in the world at conventional agricultural production.

Accordingly the Government will actively promote investment in non-GM research and development in primary industries, including non-GM crops and pastures.

Emerging technologies

From October 2019, under the National Gene Technology Scheme, the gene editing technique SDN-1¹ will not be regulated as a GMO on the basis that organisms modified using SDN-1 pose the same risk as organisms carrying naturally occurring genetic changes.

There currently is uncertainty around the national decision not to regulate SDN-1 modified organisms amongst Tasmanian businesses that export to markets that continue to consider SDN-1 modified organisms as GMOs.

The Tasmanian Government will consult with stakeholders to develop state-based regulation to control the commercial release into the Tasmanian environment of SDN-1 modified organisms. The Regulation will ensure that in Tasmania SDN-1 modified organisms are effectively regulated the same as GMOs in the agri-food sector for marketing purposes.

This will maintain the status quo and provide a clear and consistent message in the market-place for those Tasmanian businesses and industries that rely on Tasmania's GMO-free status.

¹ Genome editing using the Site Directed Nuclease (SDN) technique employs an enzyme known as a nuclease to cut a specific DNA sequence recognised by the enzyme. When the break is allowed to repair naturally and results in a random change to the DNA sequence, the resulting organism is known as an SDN-1 organism. The SDN technique typically uses one of four nucleases: a Zinc Finger Nuclease (ZFN), a transcription activator like effector nuclease (TALEN), a meganuclease or clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats (CRISPR)-associated protein 9 (Cas-9).

Through the monitoring and review program under this Policy, the Tasmanian Government will also monitor technological developments, market access and sentiment. In doing so, the Tasmanian Government will consider market responses to emerging technologies and national changes and if necessary, will consider Tasmanian-specific approaches and GMO-free marketing opportunities to support Tasmanian businesses and industry to maintain their market positioning, whilst also maintaining compliance with the National Gene Technology Scheme. If required, the Minister may also direct a review of this Policy or, as the need arises, a review of the regulation should developments warrant it.

GMO-free marketing opportunities

The Tasmanian Government is committed to promoting an operating environment and policy settings that support our primary industries to grow. This includes protecting Tasmania's widely recognised brand attributes and unique biosecurity status.

Extending the moratorium on GMOs for a further ten years enables farmers, agribusinesses and food businesses to confidently invest in their own marketing and market development activities to sell their products and to demonstrate the value of Tasmania's GMO-free status.

The Government will work with agri-food sectors to identify how our competitive advantages can play a greater role in Tasmania's premium brand attributes. This may include taking appropriate action to support Tasmanian industry and exporters with branding, market access and supply chain assurance to segregate and differentiate our GMO-free products in the marketplace.

Brand Tasmania will have a strategic role in brand positioning and communication with key markets.

The Tasmanian Trade Strategy 2019-2025 and Action Plan contains a number of initiatives which support the GMO moratorium, including:

- Promotional materials: targeted country and sector-specific promotional materials such as videos, brochures, online content and presentations for business and government to use during trade activities.
- Portal: Develop an online portal for Tasmanian businesses to submit market access, behind the border, and trade logistics concerns. This portal will be managed by the Department of State Growth and to facilitate responses and support from across government and with assistance from industry experts.
- Market Access Coordinator: Appoint a Market Access Coordinator to coordinate advocacy to relevant Australian Government agencies for Tasmanian market access priorities and provide solutions to technical issues that affect Tasmanian exporters.
- Certificates of Assurance: Exporters routinely and regularly request Certificates of Assurance. These Certificates are signed by the Premier. They refer to certain product and quality 'market values' that, according to the relevant exporters, appeal to their overseas buyers and assist them in promoting Tasmanian product. Certificates are issued once the department has received reports and/or verification from accredited auditors or suppliers details of purchase to verify the products. Audit costs are borne by the relevant exporter.
- Trade Advocates: to champion our state and work with us to help promote Tasmania's capabilities and our strong reputation for quality to the world.
- Sector specific trade events and inward buyer/delegation visits

Communication

The Tasmanian Government will develop communications materials and regularly engage in activities that explain developments in gene technology and provide information on GMOs, consumer trends and market developments for all stakeholders.

The DPIPWE website will be used as a key means of communication along with the Department of State Growth's website and trade portal in relation to trade aspects.

The Policy and supporting Guidelines are available on the DPIPWE website (www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au).

Effective date of this Policy: September 2019