

Dear xxxxxx

Thank you for your email/letter of xxxxxxxxx to the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Nicola Roxon MP regarding genetically modified (GM) wheat. As Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing with responsibility for this matter, I am responding on behalf of the Australian Government

Australia has in place a rigorous, transparent, science-based framework for the regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and GM food which is primarily the responsibility of the Gene Technology Regulator (the Regulator) and Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). Acting in collaboration, these regulatory processes provide assurance that the health and safety of people and the protection of the Australian environment are of paramount importance.

The environmental release of any GM crop in Australia is illegal unless authorised by the Regulator. There has been no commercial release of GM wheat in Australia, nor have there been any applications for commercial release submitted to the Regulator. Similarly, I can advise that there has been no application submitted to FSANZ seeking approval for GM wheat in the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code*. Any future proposal to grow GM wheat commercially for food use in Australia would require prior approval from both the Regulator and FSANZ.

The Regulator has authorised a number of small-scale field trials of GM wheat for experimental research purposes only. As such, these releases of GM wheat into the environment are on a limited scale under strict controls and subject to monitoring by the Regulator. As you would be aware, a licence to permit the intentional release of a GMO into the Australian environment is issued only if any identified risks can be managed to protect human health and the environment. GM wheat from these trials is not permitted to enter the human food supply or be used in animal feed. Any proposal for commercial release of GM wheat would have to undergo a comprehensive risk assessment by the Regulator, including extensive consultation.

Please be aware that the *Gene Technology Act 2000* confines the Regulator's assessments to risks to human health and the environment and these do not include economic and marketing considerations. Matters such as coexistence and segregation of GM and non-GM crops in agricultural supply chains are dealt with separately by industry and state/territory governments.

The issues you raise in your correspondence include concerns about the use of GM wheat in foods. I would like to reassure you that GM wheat would need to undergo a rigorous pre-market safety assessment before it could enter the food supply. The assessment would be contingent upon a comprehensive package of data that would need to address relevant food safety issues applicable to a majority of the population. The methods and approach used by FSANZ to assess the safety issues are consistent with international guidelines developed according to scientific expertise provided by the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

For almost two decades, government regulatory agencies around the world have continued to research and monitor the safety of GM foods and the scientific evidence overwhelmingly confirms that there are no health and safety issues associated with GM foods. Notwithstanding these requirements, FSANZ does not expect to receive an application seeking approval for GM wheat in the foreseeable future.

The commercial production of GM wheat is currently not permitted. Moreover, any future production of GM wheat would, of course, be subject to the mandatory approval processes outlined above. On current requirements, it is likely to be many years before any future approvals for the commercial production of GM wheat could be considered possible.

I trust the above information is useful to you.

Yours sincerely