



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **GENETICALLY MODIFIED CANOLA DETECTED IN VICTORIA SAFE AS CONVENTIONAL CANOLA**

The Australian Government Gene Technology Regulator, Dr Sue Meek, today issued an assurance that canola found in Victoria to contain genetic material that could only have been introduced using gene technology is as safe as conventional canola for both people and the environment.

Dr Meek said testing of canola seeds conducted by ABB Ltd, using new and highly sensitive analytical techniques, has detected extremely low levels of the genetic material in samples of supposedly conventional canola.

“The “DNA fingerprint” of the genetic material tells us that canola containing this particular modification (known as Topas 19/2, which confers tolerance to the herbicide glufosinate ammonium) was trialled in Australia under the former voluntary system, prior to the introduction of the national regulatory system for gene technology in 2001,” she said.

This system was overseen by the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee, and their guidelines contained similar containment provisions to limit the spread of GMOs and their introduced genetic material as those imposed in intentional release licenses issued by the Regulator.

“However, Topas 19/2 has subsequently been comprehensively assessed by both Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and the Gene Technology Regulator and approved for human consumption and commercial release.”

Dr Meek said Topas 19/2 was among a number of lines that Bayer Crop Science Pty Ltd (Bayer) included for evaluation in its application for a commercial release licence for InVigor® canola that was issued by the Regulator in 2003.

“Bayer has advised that this line also has approvals in a number of other countries, including Europe, China, the USA, Canada and Japan. However, the company has stated that it has chosen not to develop it further in Australia,” she said.

“While there are number of ways in which the genetic material could have been inadvertently incorporated into conventional canola plants, trials conducted under Commonwealth or State legislation do not seem to be a likely source.”

None of the limited and controlled releases that have been, or are being, conducted with genetically modified canola under licenses issued by the Gene Technology Regulator have introduced genetic material which matches that found in the independent tests.

The industry test results also show the genetic material found in what were thought to be conventional crop samples is different from that in the InVigor® lines authorised for use in the trials Bayer is currently conducting in accordance with the Victorian Government's moratorium legislation.

The small scale of the trial of Topas 19/2 that was conducted in Victoria prior to the establishment of the national regulatory scheme for gene technology makes it unlikely that the genetic material came from there.

"My Office is providing technical assistance to the Victorian Department of Primary Industries to help attempt to determine how and when this situation may have arisen," Dr Meek said.

"The most important message is that this genetic modification has been thoroughly assessed and approved for unrestricted release as it does not pose risks to human health and safety or the Australian environment."

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