

# Press Release

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ENVIRONMENTAL RISK MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY  
NGĀ KAIWHAKATŪPATO WHAKARARU TAIAO



**12 April 1999**

## **Media Advisory – Genetically Modified Canola.**

**This is a background note. Any requests for comment should be sent to the Communications Manager at ERMA New Zealand PH 04 496 4826 or 021 674 952**

### **1. What is canola?**

Canola or oilseed rape is a crop grown for its oil. Canola oil is used in a variety of products and foodstuffs.

### **2. Previous GM canola plantings in NZ. Information publicly available in the NZ Gazette 101 July 1998**

There are three previous approvals for canola, granted by the Interim Assessment Group IAG

- No. 42 granted to Zeneca Seeds Canada /Pacific Seeds NZ operated through Cropmark Ashburton  
Field trial site- Pukeuri North Otago  
For the period Nov96-Nov 97. A controlled field trial of canola containing Monsanto's Roundup Ready genes, for glyphosate herbicide resistance.  
Post harvest monitoring of the site until July 2001 or one year after no further canola seedlings appear on the trial site.
- No. 43 granted to Plant Genetic Systems Belgium/Crop and Food NZ operated through Enzol Holdings Ashburton.  
Field trial sites – Dromore Canterbury and St Andrews, South Canterbury  
For the period Nov 1996-Nov 1997. A controlled field trial to test genetically modified canola with genes inserted for male sterility and restoration, kanamycin resistance and herbicide resistance.  
Post harvest monitoring of the site until April 2001 Dromore and May 2001 St Andrews or one year after no further canola seedlings appear on the trial site
- No. 60 granted to Zeneca seeds Canada operated through Cropmark Ashburton  
Field trial site – Lincoln  
For the period November 1997- November 1998. A controlled field trial to produce RoundupReady canola seed for planting in Canada in the 1998 season.  
Post harvest monitoring of the site until May 2002 or one year after no further canola seedlings appear on the 400m radius trial site

### **3. How were previous trials approved and monitored?**

The previous approval system was a requirement for government institutions but voluntary for private companies. Applications were made to the Interim Assessment Group, a scientific panel, which made recommendations to the Minister for the Environment. Trials were monitored and inspected regularly by the IAG.

There was no formal legal system for approving or monitoring GMO work until the HSNO Act came into effect in July 1998. Those approvals made by the IAG for field trials [and by the Advisory Committee for Novel Genetic Techniques for GMO laboratory developments], were transferred to the HSNO Act when it started in July.

Monitoring of both previous approvals and new approvals is now the responsibility of MAF, through the Biosecurity Act.

#### **4. Future canola plantings**

The Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 set up the Environmental Risk Management Authority. All GMO work, including development, field testing or release now requires approval from ERMA New Zealand. This provides a formal statutory process, and allows for public input.

The Authority does not comment on applications until they are formally received. However it is widely understood that Monsanto is considering making an application to the Authority in the near future for a general release for canola.

There has not yet been any application made in NZ for a general release of a GMO - either to the Authority or its predecessors. Under the HSNO Act, a general release can either be 'approved' or 'declined', but it can not be 'approved with controls'. In other words, if approved it is a full scale release.

Any such approval would need to meet the minimum standards set down in S.36 of the Act. This requires the Authority to decline an application if it would cause any significant:

- displacement of native species within its natural habitat
  - deterioration of natural habitats
  - adverse effects on human health and safety
  - adverse effect to NZ's inherent genetic diversity
- or would cause disease, be parasitic, or become a vector for human, animal or plant disease.

The Authority would further have to satisfy itself that the positive effects of the organism outweighed the adverse effects.

Any enquiries about a potential Monsanto application should be directed to the company itself.

#### **5. Future monitoring**

Under the HSNO Act, the Authority has the responsibility to make decisions on GMO applications, but it does not undertake the monitoring itself.

The monitoring of GMOs is set up through a link to the Biosecurity Act and is implemented by MAF.

All GMO plant approvals granted by the Authority since July last year have been inspected by MAF, along with all previous plant trials that are still in operation.

All GMO approvals with conditions granted by the Authority in the future will also be monitored by MAF.

ERMA New Zealand has a general role to oversee the monitoring regime under the HSNO Act, but has no powers to direct any of the monitoring or enforcement agencies.

#### **6. Monitoring of canola**

All the previous canola trials approved under the old system have now ended. However, there is a post harvest monitoring period for each one, generally extending to 2001. MAF is now giving priority to inspection as part of the post harvest monitoring of these earlier field trial sites.

#### **7. Re assessment.**

ERMA New Zealand has also reviewed all the previous approvals it inherited, to see if they match up to the HSNO Act. In some cases, the approvals may need to be reassessed. Under the Act, ERMA New Zealand must first establish that there are Grounds for a Re Assessment. If this confirmed, then a formal assessment would take place, involving public input. ERMA New Zealand is currently considering if there are Grounds for a re assessment of salmon and canola.