

## **Media Information**

Release: Immediate

Date: 15 September 2005

### **Call for Accidental Presence Thresholds to be set for GM Material**

AusBiotech, Australia's Biotechnology Industry Organisation, today called on state and federal governments to work constructively with industry to address issues stemming from the identification of trace amounts of GM material in non-GM canola trials.

AusBiotech CEO, Dr Anna Lavelle said that she agreed with WA Agriculture Minister, Mr Kim Chance that the trace amounts found in the National Variety Trials fell well below acceptable international standards for accidental presence.

"As Mr Chance said in his media release yesterday, the 0.04% GM material found in the WA trials is well below the toughest standard – the EU at 0.9% - for acceptable amounts of trace material to be present," Dr Lavelle said.

"In Japan, for instance the cut of level for accidental presence of material is 5% for grain – so I agree with Mr Chance that our international markets are not at risk," she said.

Dr Ian Edwards, Chairman of AusBiotech's AgBio Advisory Group added that this incident highlighted the need for all levels of government to work with industry to set appropriate threshold levels for the accidental presence of GM material in non-GM crops.

"In the organics industry there are thresholds for pesticides and in the seeds industry there are thresholds for the amount of other seed varieties found in pure seed," he said.

"The Australian Seeds Federation has a tolerance level of 0.5% GM in non-GM seed – this is a tough standard but one that the industry can live with.

"Accidental presence is a reality of the agricultural industry, and is not a problem unique to GM," Dr Edwards said.

"Given the use of GM seeds in trials in Australia and the possibility of unintended presence in non-GM seeds brought from overseas countries that allow commercial GM crop cultivation, Australia now needs to develop its own standards.

“Recognising an acceptable level of accidental presence in non-GM crops means that farmers can coexist with their neighbours as well as other crops on their own farms,” he said.

“In Canada, where most farmers are growing GM canola, non-GM wheat is produced side by side on the same farm. Coexistence is a reality,” said Dr Edwards

Dr Lavelle said that calls for zero tolerance in this area were unsustainable and unrealistic.

“It would be like saying to organic farmers that there should be no traces of pesticide in any organic foods – it would wipe out that industry,” she said.

Dr Lavelle called on the Primary Industry Minister’s Council which is due to meet in October to set up an industry and government group to look at overseas standards and taking into account the Australian situation and experience, develop appropriate Australian standards for accidental presence of GM material.

“Setting Australian thresholds for accidental presence will provide certainty for the our farmers during the moratorium period and in the future it will ensure that if commercialisation goes ahead, a sustainable coexistence model will be established.” Dr Lavelle said.

**For further information please contact:**

Dr Anna Lavelle	CEO, Austbiotech	+61 3 9208 4203
Dr Ian Edwards	Chair AgBio AG	+61 8 9450 4804