



**safe** *meat*

# Red Meat and Livestock Industry Biotechnology Policy

**Biotechnology may be defined as “the use of biological systems – living things – to make or change products”.**

Biotechnology has been used for centuries in traditional activities like baking bread, making cheese and brewing beer. Traditional animal and plant breeding techniques involving ‘crossing’ individual animals or plants and selecting those from the new generation with the desired characteristics are also early techniques of biotechnology. These processes saw wild plants and animals become domesticated and shaped into the species that exist in agriculture today. Modern biotechnology applications as outlined below take these earlier selection processes further; although they are applied to both animal and plant

research programs globally, the animal applications are the main focus here.

Biotechnology tools being used in livestock research programs in Australia can be broken into three components:

1. General applications not resulting in a GM end-product
2. Gene technology – resulting in the development of a GM product
3. Cloning

In relation to biotechnology, most public attention is given to commercially available genetically modified (GM) crops, their use as animal feed, and research into GM animals and cloning. However, much of the research effort in Australia and globally is directed into less well-known



biotechnology applications such as genomics and molecular markers. These applications are already part of the animal breeders' toolbox complementing traditional breeding programs. They do not result in GM or cloned animals, and are unlikely to challenge consumers and key export market expectations.

The red meat industry's considerable investment in biotechnology applications through Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) means that it is a key player in addressing such issues and providing a leadership role in ensuring an informed and educated industry and marketplace.

Annually, the gross value of Australian cattle and calf production (including live cattle exports) is approximately \$7.7 billion; the gross value of sheep, lamb and live sheep is estimated at \$1.86 billion; and goatmeat and live goat exports are valued at \$75.2 million. Australia is the second largest beef exporter globally behind Brazil, the second largest lamb and mutton exporter behind New Zealand and the leading goatmeat exporter.

To maintain this competitive position in the market, the red meat industry is investing in technologies of the future, which include biotechnology. Awareness of such

applications and the significant research and investment in biotechnology in the livestock arena is vital for the red meat industry in Australia to take a proactive role in establishing dialogue and best practice approaches to deliver technologies to the market.

This approach by the red meat industry is reflected in the biotechnology recommendations made by the Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group commissioned by the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. These recommendations can be summarised as increased communication efforts about the benefits of biotechnology applications and the robustness of the regulatory regime; industry and government working together to facilitate faster uptake of biotechnology applications; and state governments lifting their moratoriums.

This policy document is also timely as Australia has been appointed 'lead country' for discussions regarding the safety of food from GM animals at a Codex Taskforce on Foods Derived from Biotechnology meeting.



## MLA/SAFEMEAT supports the following policy principles:

### The science and its terminology

**1. Biotechnology is broad-ranging.** The Australian red meat industry (the industry) agrees to act to raise awareness of, and gather support for, the broad aspects of biotechnology, including outcomes already in the marketplace and those more likely to enter the marketplace in the future.

**2. Recognise potential benefits.** The industry recognises significant potential benefits from the use of some forms of biotechnology along the entire supply chain, and the need for its development and application in an integrated systems approach. This will require investment in R&D, commercialisation of intellectual property, and the development of strategic research and commercial relationships.

**3. Recognise potential risks.** The industry recognises that applications of biotechnology in livestock and red meat production may also pose some risks that need to be thoroughly researched and understood from the perspective of consumers, the environment and participants in the industry supply chain.

**4. Use consistent language.** As part of a greater industry and consumer education and communication initiative, the red meat industry agrees to use consistent language and definitions relating to the science involved in biotechnology in discussions with stakeholders and the general public.

### Regulation

**5. Safety and environmental obligations.** The industry recognises its obligations with biotechnology to provide products that meet appropriate animal

safety, food safety and quality requirements, and have community acceptance in terms of sound and environmentally appropriate production and processing practices.

**6. Transparent, science-based regulation.** The industry agrees that a clear and transparent regulatory system is required for the confidence of all stakeholders, and supports the Gene Technology Act 2000 and the Office of Gene Technology Regulator and other regulatory instruments governing the use of facets of biotechnology. Further, as a matter of urgency, the industry agrees to work with government to address the issue of regulatory requirements for cloning, to ensure the industry is positioned to capture the benefits and address the risks before the technology becomes a major tool for the red meat sector.

### 7. Access to approved products.

The industry supports investment in biotechnology research and access to regulatory approved products without unnecessary impediments, including unreasonable compliance costs.

**8. International standards.** The industry will collaborate with other countries and international standard setting bodies regarding biotechnology to ensure robust safeguards and transparency of decision-making which does not create artificial barriers or disincentives to innovation or trade.

### Markets

### 9. Ethical and social considerations.

The industry recognises the need to be aware of the ethical and social issues surrounding the use of biotechnology, and the animal welfare and health considerations, particularly in the development of GM and cloned animals.

**10. Supply chain choice.** The industry recognises that producers, processors and retailers have choice in the application, or otherwise, of biotechnology and encourages the investigation of options to support this choice. However, the industry also recognises that if biotechnology adoption continues this choice may be reduced, particularly in relation to animal health and animal feed options.



**11. Market intelligence.** The industry recognises the potential diversity in technology and market positions that may arise, and the need for the industry to reasonably cater for such diversity and associated outcomes where feasible. The industry supports the proactive monitoring and regular gathering of market intelligence and public perception data – both nationally and internationally – which impact the elements of this policy.

**12. Changing commercial environment.** The industry recognises that community and market expectations are undergoing change and that a high

level of uncertainty currently exists in relation to commercial returns on investment in research and development in this area, and that such investments should be subject to rigorous technical and commercial evaluation prior to approval. Further, the industry agrees to maintain sound knowledge about the research effort underway globally in order to maintain a competitive approach in the development of these key technologies.

## An informed industry

**13. Proactive communication/education.** The industry recognises the need to proactively inform and educate stakeholders about biotechnology and to develop an industry communication strategy, to ensure a rational and informed debate.

## Further information

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A detailed paper on the Red Meat and Livestock Industry Biotechnology Policy can be found at <http://www.safemeat.com.au/>

Published on behalf of SAFEMEAT by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA)

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