

Grower response 'positive' to poppy newcomer

By PETER SANDERS

The entry of a third player in the Tasmanian poppy industry had the potential to add a new dimension to the industry, Poppy Growers Association of Tasmania president Lyndley Chopping said.

Mr Chopping was referring to Tuesday's announcement by TPI Enterprises that it had been licensed to produce and sell narcotics.

But the association needed to hear more specific information about TPI's plans before it could comment further, he said.

TPI managing director Jarrod Ritchie said on Tuesday that its Cressy processing plant was making samples for customers from this year's 3ha trial crop, grown in the North-East.

The company was about to submit for an expanded trial crop of 10ha that would include growers from the Cressy area, he said.

But TPI won't be rushing into large-scale production.

"There is no doubt that there has been a softening of the market with countries such as Spain, Hungary and Turkey planting large areas," he said.

"Australia was the leading producer in 2001 ... in 2004 France became the world's largest grower of morphine - we're

confident that we can reclaim that for Tasmania.

"We're hopeful that we'll be able to get some of the farmers (who have left the industry over the past few years) on board.

"We're hoping shortly to be able to confirm some substantial areas - we've done a lot of market research and are confident of getting those orders.

"Ultimately, we'd see about 50 employees at the Cressy plant."

Mr Ritchie said that the response to TPI from Tasmanian farmers had been "very positive".

"The farmers are keen to have options," he said.

"Over a four- to five-year period we'll be expanding from the stage one facility, capable of about 10 tonnes, all the way up to stage four and about 100 tonnes ... by 2010-2011."

Mr Ritchie said that TPI would be able to compete with countries like Spain and Turkey because of its lower-cost, solvent-free extraction process.

The company received an AusIndustry award last year for "innovation in developing alternative thebaine poppies and enhanced extraction techniques".