



GM Free Margaret River

Legislative Council Committee
Parliament House
4 Harvest Tce
West Perth WA 6005

Submission addressed to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, West Australian Parliament.

Submission topic: Inquiry into mechanisms for compensation for economic loss to farmers in Western Australia caused by contamination by genetically modified material.

Our group, GM Free Margaret River, has been a strong advocate for compensation for economic loss for farmers whose land or crops have been contaminated by genetically modified (GM) material, ever since GM crops were first introduced into WA.

We support a compulsory insurance scheme for anyone dealing with agricultural GMOs. The law needs to be enforceable, with strict liability for anyone dealing with GMOs, such as manufacturers, importers, transporters and GM farmers.

It must ensure sufficient compensation to fully restore a contaminated farm to its former GM free status with compensation for a farmer's loss of earnings and stress.

In WA, the biotech industries have pushed for GM crops for their own commercial advantage. The previous government ignored the right of non- GM farmers to protection from GM contamination. A compensation scheme should be funded by all who seek to profit from GM.

The case of Kojonup farmer, Steve March, demonstrates that the rights of non-GM farmers are not protected in WA. Apart from the fact that non GM farmers outnumber GM farmers, it should be the right of any farmer to be protected from GM contamination.

GM seed is not selective as to where it contaminates. Protection also needs to be provided for roadsides, national parks and all public spaces.

Consumers have never sought out GM food, in fact a high percentage have indicated they do not want to eat it. So, until long term, independent studies can demonstrate it is safe to eat, consumers will remain wary of it. As a result GM markets will remain limited and GM free products will continue to sell at a premium. Our state faces increased GM contamination if a law protecting farmers' rights is not introduced, with a subsequent loss of markets and profits.

The state is in a difficult situation. There needs to be a moratorium on growing of GM until a strict liability system is in place. If our state is anything like other parts of the world where GM is grown, there will already be considerable contamination which has yet to become evident. How will this be addressed?

The new law must be simple and enforceable so a farmer can bring a claim without the need of lawyers. The biotech industry is aggressive and will be determined not to lose the powerful position they have established in WA. The law needs to be strong enough to withstand their attacks.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours sincerely
Tracy Skippings

Committee member
GM Free Margaret River