

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs for the petition tabled by Hon Diane Evers MLC on 13 June 2017.

Ref: Petition No. 010

Petition to compensate GM-Free Farmers if economically affected by GM contamination.

This submission has been prepared by Sam West, age 31, grain and sheep farmer in Wagin Western Australia.

I urge the Government NOT to introduce regulation or legislation to compensate non-GM farmers who may be affected by contamination.

I am writing this as a farmer. Not putting a label on myself or a pigeon-hole title such as "GM farmer", "conventional farmer" "organic farmer" or a myriad of other titles which people bestow upon themselves, just a farmer.

I am not currently growing GM canola due to rotational decisions but have in the past and will again in the future.

Since the beginning of agriculture farmers have had differences of opinion which manifest in differences of practice. Sometimes these differences will clash and negatively interact. In the vast majority of instances these issues have been able to be dealt with through common sense and the practicalities that farmers possess and the knowledge that you have to farm next to your neighbours for a lifetime, in many cases. On the odd occasion that disputes aren't able to be resolved we have courts which can make a more official ruling with the possibility of awarding compensation, such as the Marsh vs. Baxter case.

The way we are focusing on GM as the only possible cause of loss through contamination is quite absurd. As an example, I recently had a grain truck crash and spill a load of oats on the road reserve bordering my farm. Thankfully the driver was ok, and in the transport industry these events will happen, but the first question that the police asked was "is this grain GM".

Practically if it was GM canola it would be quite easy to control any possible contamination on my farm, within my current cost structure. On the other hand if it was a load of grain contaminated with noxious weeds such as skeleton weed it would be next to impossible to control and cost tens of thousands of dollars. The risk of contamination would be increased if the farmer was an organic farmer who fundamentally limits the amount of sound weed control practices available to them.

Other possible contamination risk to my business, apart from weeds is parasites and disease in stock, such as Ovine Johnes disease, Lice and intestinal worms. Again these risks are heightened by poor management practices and if passed to another farmer through accident or negligence could cost the 10s if not 100s of thousands of dollars to rectify over many years. All of these risks are increased by the use of "organic" practices.

