

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 Paul Brown MLC.
Ref: Petition No 69

Petition to Protect Farms from GM Contamination Retain the WA Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003

This submission has been prepared by Anne-Marie Copeland, 682 Clamp Road, Mukinbudin WA 6479. I am a farmer from Mukinbudin. I have not taken my complaint to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

We ask to retain the GM Crops Free Areas Act (2003) because it is an essential part of the national regulatory system and aims to protect the rights of farmers who wish to remain GM free here in WA. In a world where there is an ever increasing demand for GM free food, to contaminate our markets with GM would be detrimental to the future of farming in WA.

When GM was introduced in the US in the mid-90's, it was not segregated and has been a litigious minefield since.

Consumers are now more aware and are calling for traceability of GM throughout the supply chain. Recent GMO labeling ballots in the US and worldwide marches indicate the current trend.

Australia has a unique competitive advantage globally if it can continue to supply GM-free products (1)

The removal of the Act will allow any one in WA to grow a GM crop that has been approved by the OGTR without regard for the economic impact in WA on non-GM markets, or farmers who wish to remain GM-free. On this point, I query why there is no EPA impact assessment of the intentional release of novel GM organisms to the environment.

The rights of the non-GM farmer have been disregarded and ignored by this government and the removal of the Act would severely impact on their right to farm the way they choose.

The introduction of GM wheat would be problematic for our wheat markets, as there is NO market in the world for GM wheat. Many countries have banned the growing and importation of GM and to contaminate our markets would be an economic disaster. (2)

In fact we have seen countries (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan) place immediate embargoes on imports of US wheat when they merely perceived a risk of contamination after GM wheat from trials that had been discontinued but had contaminated local farms in the Oregon area. (3)

Testing is expensive and time consuming, who should pay? There is a high rate of false negatives. (4) When shipments are rejected, who should pay?

In line with the findings of the 2009 review of the Act under section 19, we call for an independent review by all stakeholders, not just a review that relies on one Minister and one political party.

Farmers have never been given the opportunity to voice their opinions on the introduction of GM in their industry.

There has been no consultation with the grass roots farmer, farmers who feel disenfranchised by and are not members of either of the two main farm lobby groups, the PGA and WAFF.

Both of these groups have pushed their own GM agendas, although WAFF have now cautioned on the release of GM wheat as they can see problems with markets. (5)

Consumers who drive the markets need to be included, their rights have been ignored as well, it is economic suicide to ignore them.

You just have to look at what sectors are growing the fastest in the world, the GM- FREE brand, farmers markets and organic food are growing exponentially. (6)

Consumers are demanding clean, green food, not food grown in an industrialised system, a system using GM seeds patented to chemical corporations. (7)

GM-Free Farming needs to be supported by the government as farmers need to be able to retain the right to seed save. Multi-generational knowledge of the land, understanding of the changing climate and diverse conditions of our large state cannot simply be replaced by a single-sourced patented laboratory product. With ever increasing costs farmers are struggling with small margins now, and then to impose a system that requires farmers to purchase seed every year could well be the financial ruination of many more farms.

The statewide moratorium on GM crops was in place for a good reason, restated during the GM canola and cotton Disallowance motions. The risks detailed in Hansard remain, or have now been proven. Contamination will occur, has occurred and co-existence cannot work in the long term, especially as protocols for reducing contamination have not been implemented. Practices during trials are not maintained nor policed after commercial release.

As for segregation in the system, one cannot assume that there will not be human error. One just has to go to a storage facility to see the result of human error, canola put on barley stacks, barley put on wheat stacks, this is not an unusual occurrence.

We also ask the government to introduce Farmer Protection Legislation to compensate any non-GM farmer who suffers economic loss from GM contamination.

This is important because protocols for limiting contamination have been proven ineffective.

Farmers need to have confidence that their GM-free farms do not suffer economic loss because it has been impacted by the practices of their neighbour.

It is anti-competitive that GM farmers at this point have been allowed to contaminate non-GM farms without any regard to the harm they are doing.

Why are the rights of GM farmers more important than the rights of non-GM farmers? If farmers want to farm GM, surely it's their responsibility to keep it on their farm and not contaminate other farms.

Instead of giving farmers choice, GM will limit choice, in fact there will be no choice other than to grow GM. Major seed companies are already using vigorous hybrid canola varieties to insert their GM traits, leaving the less vigorous varieties as non-GM.

That is an obvious ploy to increase GM usage. The GM industry is being driven by large corporations to which the WA farmer is inconsequential.

This committee has a chance to look at the bigger picture and help steer agricultural policy away from a system that requires more and more expensive inputs every year towards a more sustainable system, a system that nurtures the soil, a system that doesn't rely on expensive inputs.

WA has an opportunity to pick up on a worldwide growing consumer demand for clean green ethically grown food.

There are many examples of new products that have had to be recalled from general use to tightly-controlled limited use or total bans. For example, DDT, PCBs, fluorocarbons, lead, asbestos, mercury, uranium, thalidomide, smoking. Industry self-regulation does not work without government intervention to protect the public interest. This is all the more crucial with GM organisms as they are self-replicating and ownership of GM progeny are legally contentious. If the government allows release of GMOs to the environment, it has a statutory duty of care BEFORE release to design a system that allows traceability, incident reporting and product recall.

Farmers rights need to be protected, the rights of large multi national companies should not come before the rights of the citizens of WA.

The fact that this government sold a major part of Intergrain to Monsanto compromises their ability to look after farmers and they should not be dismantling an Act that goes in some part towards protecting the very people the government was elected to serve.

Justice Kenneth Martin in lifting the cost ceiling in the GM contamination court case of Marsh v Baxter acknowledged the complexity of the case. In light of this and shortfalls of the legislation, I ask the Committee to recommend an inquiry into the research, development and growing of GM crops in WA.

I would like to appear before a hearing of this committee.

Thank you
Anne-Marie Copeland

(1)<http://www.gmwatch.org/index.php/news/rss/14908-non-gm-demand-rocketing-in-us>

(2)http://safefoodfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/12-228-GE-Wheat-Report_FINAL.pdf

(3)<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jun/22/agriculture-oregon-monsanto-gm-wheat>

(4)http://www.agriculture.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/ag-food/biotech/Final_GM_Report_July_04.pdf

(5)<http://www.farmweekly.com.au/news/agriculture/agribusiness/general-news/wafarmers-reserves-decision/2701835.aspx?storypage=0>

(6)<http://www.non-gmoreport.com/articles/may2011/nonGMOgrowingnaturalfoodcategory.php>

(7)<http://www.ogtr.gov.au/internet/ogtr/publishing.nsf/content/gmprod-approved-asfood2014-2>