

Parliamentary enquiry call for Submission:

I am pleased to submit my submission to the **Inquiry into mechanisms for compensation for economic loss to farmers in Western Australia caused by contamination by genetically modified material.**

I am a farmer operating on a 2700 Ha property within the Cunderdin shire in the central wheatbelt of Western Australia. I have owned and managed a conventional mixed farming enterprise consisting of grains, fodder and livestock on various properties in the central wheatbelt since 1992.

My education in agriculture began as a child working with my father in the marginal north eastern regions of the wheatbelt. My education was consolidated at Scotch College and became focussed on Agriculture at Cunderdin Agricultural College and Morawa Agricultural College. I have since completed further Agricultural studies at Muresk institute and built on the foundations of this education during my career as a farmer.

Over the last decade I have begun to realise that my extensive agricultural education had neglected to enlighten me in even the broadest sense on what I now consider to be the key most integral element of sustainability and profitability of agricultural food production, that of the microbiological soil food web. <https://www.soilfoodweb.com.au> . My enlightenment of the wonders and riches of the soil food web was accompanied by alarm. I felt misled and cheated by my realisation that the formal agricultural education of myself and almost all of my agricultural peers was inherently compromised and biased towards an extremely uneconomical and unsustainable reliance on chemical and genetic manipulation of our natural environment and contained a fundamental ignorance of the incredible regenerative and self sustaining elements of soil and plant symbology.

Since my biological awakening I began to experiment with on farm trials. I tested methods and systems designed to enhance and stimulate the natural biological systems functioning on the fields of my farm. I also aimed to simultaneously reduce the debilitating financial risk involved with applying large quantities of expensive bio degrading chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides. The success of these experiments has lead me to transition almost all of my farmland to certified organic status resulting in significantly improved measures of financial and environmental sustainability far beyond my initial hopes and expectations.

Ian James

Inquiry terms of reference:

Inquire into and report on mechanisms for compensation for economic loss to farmers in Western Australia caused by contamination by genetically modified material, including approaches taken in Western Australia and by other jurisdictions and any other relevant matter.

Submission content.

As a farmer who has recently transitioned parts of my property to certified Organic status I want to highlight areas of concern I have with the abolition of the GM Free Areas Act. It is well known that the adventurous presence of GM seeds or GM organic material on an area of certified organic farmland will lead to decertification, however what is less well known or understood is that farmland that has been subjected to the presence of GM organisms may not be certified for a period of 5 years.

This was my experience in November 2013 when a thunderstorm and resulting hail storm and flash flood resulted in enormous numbers of Roundup Ready GM canola seeds being washed from an neighbouring property down the catchment onto my own farm.

This occurrence was well documented at the time in the media and in state parliament with the Greens member for Fremantle Lynn McLaren questioning the then minister for Agriculture Terry Redmond on his awareness of our situation.

It was reported at the time that the Department of Agriculture visited our farm and that no presence of GM was found on our property from testing of seedlings at the site however this reporting fundamentally misrepresented the facts.

The fact is that the visit by the representatives of the Ag. Dept. tested seeds along the road side adjacent to our property and although the testing indicated that GM seeds existed on the road side, none were found on our property. However subsequent testing of germinated seedlings in the weeks following the rainfall and flooding founds very high numbers of GM canola seedlings hundreds of meters down the decline into our paddock where the water flowed. The results of this later testing were verified by an independent body and relayed to the Dept. of Ag. however, no interest was shown in the evidence.

The fact that this area was contaminated by GM material meant that as we began to transition our farm to Organic status the contaminated area could not obtain certified organic status for a period of 5 years. This has been a significant barrier to my efforts to become a financially viable organic grain production enterprise and has significantly delayed implementation of organic certification on my farm.

I have GM farmers on almost every boundary of my farm and although I am now much closer to 100% organic certification on my property I hold grave fears for my long term financial security due to the high likelihood of further GM contamination events that I believe will be almost impossible to avoid while GM canola production is carried out without carefully considered mitigation strategies.

Financial impact.

The financial impact of this delay can be measured by the per hectare margin of one system over the other. My farm generates more than double the profit per hectare from the organic when compared to the conventional operations.

Thankyou, Ian James