

22 July 2016

As a matter of great concern I am writing to correct a number of faulty and therefore misleading assumptions presented in the Productivity Commission's *Draft Report on the Regulation of Australian Agriculture* (July 2016).

It is laughable to maintain, as the *Draft Report* does in its Finding 6.1, that “the successful coexistence of GM and non-GM crops ... has been demonstrated both in Australia and overseas.” The High Court of Australia has already heard bitter and costly “contamination” disputes in relation to Monsanto's Roundup Ready Canola (to cite just one GMO)<sup>1</sup> which has had dire economic and social impacts, especially on Australia's organic agriculture sector. The Productivity Commission's Draft Report conveniently ignores the significance of this legal decision, which

**provides no assurance that organic farming and GMO farming can happily coexist under the current legal framework.”<sup>2</sup>**

The incursion of GMO crops onto Australia's certified organic agricultural lands will simply ensure that “price premiums for non-GM products,” as currently enjoyed by many Australian farmers, will be rendered null and void. These civil proceedings brought before the High Court directly contradict the bald assertion made in the second half of Finding 6.1 of the *Draft Report*.

As for overseas examples, the OGTR website points to instances of non-approved GM wheat being detected in US agricultural systems—more than a dozen years after the last field tests of that particular GMO were conducted. On the admission of the OGTR itself, following the lead of its US counterpart, the significance of this regulatory breach remains uncertain.<sup>3</sup> Such findings call into serious question that “successful coexistence of GM and non-GM crops” platitude touted by the *Draft Report*.

If anything, these and other incursions of GM crops into conventional agricultural systems undermine public confidence in the ability of OGTR and other regulators to exercise competent oversight. Thus, the claim that the OGTR is a “respected regulatory body” (*Draft Report*, p. 21) contains an element of wishful thinking. The question remains: respected by whom? The public at large is highly sceptical of such regulatory bodies—as it is of GMO technology as a whole—and with good reason.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/high-court-rejects-organic-farmer-steve-marshs-appeal-over-canola-contamination-20160212-gmszom.html>

<sup>2</sup> John Paull, “GMOs and Organic Agriculture: Six Lessons From Australia.” *Agriculture & Forestry*, 61 (1): 7-14 (2015), p. 13, emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> <http://ogtr.gov.au/internet/ogtr/publishing.nsf/Content/non-approved-gmwheat-htm>

It is therefore disappointing to see that the Productivity Commission adopts a condescending attitude towards the public and concerned citizens, proposing what is in effect a propagandizing strategy to promote an unpopular biotechnological regime through the dissemination of biased (pro-GM) information (*Draft Report*, pp. 238–40). Without their full informed consent, however, consumers of GMO food are little more than guinea pigs in a global experiment designed to benefit state and corporate stakeholders. To tout, as the *Draft Report* does, the nutritional benefit to the developing world of Golden Rice (p. 239), is to ignore the ethical complexities of GMO technology and the controversial history of its application.<sup>4</sup>

The surreptitious manner in which such a controversial proposal as GMO agriculture has been re-introduced to the political agenda—not once was it explicitly signalled in the Productivity Commission’s Terms of Reference—suggests an alarming absence of ethical consideration on the part of the Australian Government.

Yours sincerely

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<sup>4</sup> <http://retractionwatch.com/2015/07/30/golden-rice-paper-pulled-after-judge-rules-for-journal/>