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GMO-Inquiry-submission6-99

## **Inquiry into primary producer access to Gene Technology**

**From: WARATAH SEED CO. LTD.**

We make this submission because we are precisely the type of primary producers that your inquiry is targeted to investigate. We are a group of 36 small to medium sized farmers who produce Registered Seed of all field crops. We came together 8 years ago to buy, grow and market PBR lines. Since then we have secured around 10 lines of seed, but grow many more lines for other seed companies. We have links interstate and now (we believe) links to international biotechnology.

*Almost all our members are family farmers who have for many years sold professionally produced seed in their respective areas.*

To comment on the questions

### **FUTURE VALUE OF GMO'S**

Even a superficial inspection shows reduction of chemicals, increases of yield, expansion of crops in areas and whole new areas of agriculture such as use of GMO Canola to replace human blood in medical technology.

If GMO crops are better in any area and we remain an export nation then we must embrace the technology.

### **TO COMPETE**

To compete we must be able to do what we do best.

Lets divide the answer into 2

1. To compete as a farmer with traditional varieties.

Bearing in mind that a GMO is at the moment a *traditionally available variety* with a (mostly) gene or gene sequence inserted, competition is difficult. For example if we grew (say) Laura Field Peas (our variety but it gets pea weevil) and someone (says XYZ seeds) had Laura Peas with 1 gene inserted from a bean to protect Laura Peas from pea weevil.

It is very hard to compete because XYZ Seeds produce the same pea for 2 less sprayings of insecticide and no peripheral damage from stray weevils.

However we make the point, and will do so often, that XYZ Seeds will only compete if their *technology is cheap enough for farmers to access.*

2. To Compete as a Nation we must have access to Gene Technology and be able to develop our own or competition will beat us.

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### **COMMERCIALISATION AND MARKETING**

This is happening now. There is no distinction in the market between the access that is available to small, medium or large producers. We are a group of basically small producers set up to market seed and grain. Our members understand commercialisation, they collect royalties and forward them to us to go to breeding Institutions. Many of our growers grow contract crops and some have livestock contracts. But all are traditional farmers.

### **THE COST**

The cost of Gene Technology will be what the market will bear - this has been the case for 4000 years and I see nothing to change it. If the farmers see the cost as too expensive then they will not buy it. For any GMO variety to be successful there must be a margin of profit for the farmer. History suggests that for any new technology to succeed it must offer farmers between \$4 (margin) to \$7 profit for each \$1 spent. Such was the case for major Technology charges eg. Hybrid maize, mechanisation (horses to tractors ) and extra nitrogen.

### **OTHER IMPEDIMENTS**

There is still a degree of ignorance among farmers about intellectual property, this will change.

The worst impediment we can see is if GMO's have to jump a hurdle non GMO'd crops don't have, to satisfy a noisy few radicals who cannot accept change.

### **CURRENT PROTECTIVE RIGHTS**

Except for the case before the High Court (Plant Breeders V's Statutory Marketers) there is evidence that all operates properly. There is available PBR and Patents. The establishment of a Gene Technology Office will help.

### **EDUCATION**

We can never do enough but at the moment we could do a lot more. We need to get emotion out of the argument and keep it science based.

Much bigger and more eloquent submissions will be sent to you, we are what we are.

- i. A group of 36 small to medium farmers who have the expertise and (we believe) the arrangements in hand to produce and sell GMO's to other farmers.
- ii. We have agreements with other groups Australia wide with expertise particularly in field crops.
- iii. Provided we can access the technology as a nation we see no problem in producing the seed to Farmers of any size.
- iv. We believe we have a process in place to access this technology.

Hugh Roberts  
Chairman  
8 June 1999