

Governments duped over GM food crops

23-Aug-2007

By Charles Rue

Most Australian states have started reviews of their 2004 GM Acts which carry a de facto moratorium on growing genetically modified (GM) crops. The pro-GM lobby has responded with an orchestrated campaign.

Liberal insider Guy Pearce's website, [High and Dry](#), tells how the Howard government's climate change policies became captive to the "greenhouse mafia" because of an ideology of neo-liberal economics. A 'GM mafia' has captured the Federal political scene and is pressuring State GM Reviews.



"In the absence of consumer take-up of its products, selling stocks has become a biotech industry lifeline", stated *The Wall Street Journal* in 2004. In 'Biotech's dismal bottom line: More than \$40 billion in losses', it spelt out the immediate GM agenda.

Australian State governments been caught up in a religious type rapture over biotech promises of silver bullets. They have become naïve investors seemingly unaware of biotech economic strategies. Industry lobbyists such as the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and its PR arm the Australian Environment Foundation have egged them on.

More importantly, big long-term profits for biotech companies will come through monopoly control of the food industry.

To achieve this, government mechanisms have been white-anted. In Australia, it means implementing the biotech led Trade Related Intellectual Properties (TRIPs) Agreement of the WTO and manipulating both the Office of Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) and Food and Safety Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ).

Australia has implemented patenting laws that benefit GM seed companies. These are reinforced by the US-Aus Free Trade Agreement. (Pharmaceuticals are under the

same threat). Farmers will be forced to buy GM patented seed and consumers will have no choice but to buy GM food in a monopoly system. The TRIPs office within DFAT has proved reluctant to reveal who forms Australian policy on patenting at WTO meetings.

The next step is to have federal bureaucracies help implement biotech monopoly of the food chain. The OGTR was set up to guarantee health and environmental standards but is headed by Dr Sue Meek who formerly promoted biotech based industries. The OGTR has approved GM crops without regard for the 'precautionary principle'. This lack of caution is evidenced by the GM contamination of Australian canola seed.

GM contamination of the crops of conventional breeders and organic growers suits the long-term economic goals of the biotech companies; to undermine economic rivals. The OGTR is only restrained by State GM Acts of 2004 which have shown at least some concern for the economics of farmers about issues such as seed separation. That is why the State Reviews are under attack.

An aspect deserving attention is the negative effects of GM plants on the genetics of the natural environment. In economic terms it is a mere externality. However, for wheat and other food crops, cross pollination means GM contamination of genetic riches. It will grow worse as Roundup-Ready (gluphosate) crops become ineffective and replaced by Agent Orange related Dicamba-Ready GM crops.

The OGTR does no independent testing about health or environmental impacts. It relies on what the biotech companies tell them. Independent testing by the iconic CSIRO has all but stopped as it has been forced to form profit-oriented commercial partnership with biotech companies. These are bound by confidentiality clauses.

FSANZ, like OGTR, does no independent testing yet controls the approval of foods for consumption and food labelling. Food ingredients under one per cent GM go unlabelled. Even the report of Minister McGauran prepared by ACIL Tasman says that 'consumers in some countries are not aware they are purchasing and consuming products containing GM foods. It is of note that co-founder of ACIL Tasman, David Trebeck, is on the board of Graincorp.

Information presented in the media has been deliberately limited or given as spin. The reports of Jason Koutsoukis are examples of creating the impression that lifting GM moratoriums is a done deal and consumers are for it. When reporting on a survey on customer attitudes to GM by Biotechnology Australia his article did not

explain that key survey questions were prefaced with 'What if?' caveats supposing evidence about health safety and benefits.

The Catholic Church in India is responding to the alarming number of suicides among farmers, many because of failed GM cotton crops. It would be good to see Catholic moralists and ethical institutes in Australia venture out of the bedroom and into the kitchen. Morality is about care for God's gift of life in every form. It means addressing what the alliance of the 'GM-mafia' and neo-liberal economics is doing.

Recommended Websites:

[Concerned Farmers](#)

[Science in Society](#)

[Gene Watch](#)