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A Bad Decision: why WA should reverse course on GM crops extend the GM moratorium

Last Monday, 25th January 2010, while we were all thinking about Australia Day, the WA government ignored the findings of its own review and announced their decision to overturn the moratorium on the commercial cultivation of Genetically Modified (GM) crops that had been in place in WA since 2003. From now on, the commercial cultivation of GM canola will be permitted in WA.

WAPF has released a paper criticizing this decision written by Dr Maggie Lilith. Dr Lilith is well qualified to point out the pitfalls of the widespread introduction of GM crops. She is the spokesperson on GM issues for the Conservation Council of WA (CCWA) and was the Sustainable Agriculture Officer with CCWA until March 2009 and represented the organization on the GMO Industry Reference Group. Dr Lilith is also the former Vice President of the Organic Growers Association of WA.

Dr Lilith explains why from both a safety and commercial point of view, GM crops are a very risky bet for WA. She says that *“We ought to have exercised the precautionary principle and wait until the case was proved beyond doubt. Some contamination of non-GM crops is now inevitable.”* WAPF Director Julian Roche commented that *“As the paper says, at the moment it is up to WA farmers to keep GM out of their fields, rather than GM farmers keeping it under control. In addition, non GM farmers will have to pay a fine for any GM contamination even if it is not their fault This places the liability in the wrong place: it’s akin to a neighbour having to keep a ferocious dog out of his yard rather than the owner keeping the pet in”*.

On a more optimistic note, Dr Lilith puts the case why a future WA Government should reverse course and reimpose the moratorium. *“All is not yet lost. Cleaning up after the Barnett Government’s GM experiment will not be easy or quick, but it will be possible. We can have clean agriculture in this State again if there is the political will in the future”*.

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