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GM compensation inquiry ignores common law failings

The West Australian parliamentary inquiry report into no-fault compensation for Genetically Manipulated (GM) crop contamination is toothless,” says Gene Ethics Director, Bob Phelps.

The committee finds many legal, social and personal impacts from contamination but still backs going to court, even though court cases are too risky, expensive, time consuming and harrowing for most people.

The Inquiry agrees that, “Potential sources of contamination in agriculture extend beyond genetically modified material to include pesticides, weeds, various diseases and straying livestock.”

“Yet their report proposes nothing to fairly, simply and amply compensate anyone for GM or any other form of farm or food contamination,” he says

“This is why we advocated a no-fault compensation fund to easily and quickly pay people for their proven economic losses or harm.”

The committee also claims, “There is minimal evidence of systemic contamination by genetically modified material in Western Australia.”

“But systemic GM contamination is obvious as there is a 0.9% threshold of GM contamination allowed in grains, and any shipment suspected of GM contamination is dumped in the GM bin,” Mr Phelps says.

“GM-free farmers pay for such down-grades as they lose the premium prices available for their GM-free crops.”

“The social impacts of GM contamination are also high and unacceptable.”

As the committee admits, “The breakdown of neighbour relationships does not help resolve cross boundary issues or the impacts from different farming systems (and) has broader impacts affecting the whole of the district.”

“We believe the bullying and ostracism of neighbours is a major reason that GM contamination is under-reported and a no-fault compensation scheme would help resolve this community cancer.”

“Despite the toothless report and its flaky findings, we will continue to advocate compensation for GM contamination to all governments,” Mr Phelps concludes.

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