

Farm Weekly – Letter to the Editor

Little learnt from world class scientist

Sent 27th February 2007

Dear Sir,

I feel for the world class and respected scientist Dr John O'Donovan who was the keynote speaker at the Crop Updates recently. The Farm Weekly reporter seemed to have missed the important points that John was raising and converted his speech into a "snigger". Anyone who knows John and who heard him speak knows that he is a clear and factual scientist with rigor for facts. It would be good if the reporters could report the facts as clearly and as balanced as John did to the audience of perhaps 600 who heard him first-hand statewide.

John is not interested in politics, nor does he have any vested interests in whether we adopt or reject GM technology. Which, incidentally, he says has helped Canadian farmers stabilise their incomes in both droughts and floods, control resistant wild oats and other grasses through a novel herbicide and make Canadian farmers a lot of money.

It is hard to believe that Minister Chance could not see such a talk as a high priority, at least for one of his minders. To say "no comment" on such a useful and relevant talk is a classic "Yes Minister" response. Indeed this is the eight prominent Canadian agricultural scientist, that I am aware of, that has been through WA in the last 5 years with intimate and independent knowledge of GM canola. To my knowledge the Minister, nor his advisers, have made any attempt to talk to these people about their fears. These respected visitors are: Dr Linda Hall, Dr Bob Blackshaw, Dr Neil Harker, Scott Day, David Wreford, Dr Bruce Murray, Roy Button, and recently Dr John O'Donovan.

For the record, I state that I have not received any funds in any form from any of the GM or seed companies. I have received funds from GRDC to help fill the knowledge gap. My motivation to promote GMs for WA came from tax payers funds who gave me a 12 month Ag Dept job exchange in Canada in 1996. This is the year when GM canola was first released widely, since then I have been perplexed as to why we have not adopted this same powerful and safe technology. I fear that wheat on wheat and stubble burning and overgrazing for weed control will undo much of the benefit that we have created with no-tillage in droughts and for rains when they come.

It would be good if the anti-GM group, and the Ministers office, could say that they are not being regularly lobbied by Green peace and their partners. It is difficult for independent pro-GM scientists to meet with Chance. It is also disappointing that Mr Chance has appointed the Green peace spokesperson, Dr Judy Carman from Adelaide, to do \$90,000 worth of tax-payers funds on safety tests on GM products when millions of dollars and hundreds of independent studies have already been done and he has a list of these studies. Not to mention that we have all been eating GM for 10 years with no problems and with Federal government approval. If this issue were not so serious it would be funny. Chance has been unduly influenced by lobbyists, who have direct and immediate access to his office.