



press clip

# Grower calls for GM road to open

By COLIN BETTLES

MECKERING graingrower John Snooke has told WA Premier Colin Barnett, that the GM Crops Free Areas Act 2003 was effectively creating a road block to biotechnology research in WA and needed to be removed.

"What the Act is saying, really, is that agriculture is not open for business here," he said.

Mr Snooke is the National Spokesperson for the pro-biotech organisation, the Producers Forum and a member of the Pastoralist and Graziers Association grains committee.

He is also growing Genetically Modified (GM) canola on his farm this season, along with York grower Charlie Boyle, and 15 other WA growers.

Last week, Mr Snooke put a sample of frosted wheat in Mr Barnett's hands, while the Premier was standing in a GM canola crop on Mr Boyle's farm.

The frosted wheat was burned from a frost event only a few days before, and had no grain forming in the head.

Mr Snooke told Mr Barnett that he and many other people in the grains industry believed that with the moratorium in place on the commercial production of GM canola, research work into the development of frost tolerant wheat was sitting on the shelf.

To stimulate investment, he said the door needed to be opened to GM's and not slightly

ajar.

"I suppose I am, along with many others, a little bit frustrated," he said.

"We are concerned that if the Minister for Agriculture and Food allows us to grow GM next year, it will be under an exemption.

"But it is still going to limit the research and development into other wanted traits.

"I know there are marketing issues (with GM wheat), but we do face frost in this environment regularly around Cunderdin.

"Young guys like Charlie (Boyle) and I do not want to come to the Government when we have a bad event and ask them to look after us.

"We want the technology and we want to see progression in the development of it.

"I have no doubt if the moratorium gets lifted we would see WA companies adopt that gene and do research."

Mr Boyle said other GM traits could be developed, including wheat with salt tolerance, which would be a major use for all growers.

"Even if the moratorium was lifted today, we are 10 years down the track before commercialisation so it's a long hard path," Mr Snooke said.

"We just need to start that path now because if we delay it, our competitors are going to use it against us."

Agricultural Region MLC Jim

Chown said overwhelming evidence had been presented to him that showed growers were prepared to adopt GM technology, and "they just want choice".

Mr Barnett said he could see a future for biotechnology in crops other than canola.

"I hear what John is saying and the vivid demonstration of frosted wheat compared to healthy wheat, but for the moment we are only looking at cotton and canola," he said.

"I think we need to be patient for a while and ensure we get that right and make the right decision.

"I don't see GM necessarily spreading into horticultural products, but maybe other broadacre cropping products might be possible.

"I would imagine if wheat comes onto the agenda we would look at a similar process of trialling it and being sure about it.

"Personally I'm supportive of GM production, but I'm also very conscious there are different views in the community.

"There are different arguments, so we will proceed very, very carefully, and be sure of our ground at each stage.

"Trials have been done on a very professional scientific basis and I'm not going to pre-judge those, but I guess what I am seeing today, and what I'm hearing, I expect that to be a positive result for canola."



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RIGHT: WA Premier Colin Barnett (left), Meckering graingrower John Snooke, and Agricultural Region MLC Jim Chown observing a sample of frosted wheat. Mr Snooke believes frost damage could be largely avoided in future, if WA was seen as "open to business" for the development of biotechnology traits in wheat.

