

8.3.02

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Dear Ayse,
This is my submission #4, titled

Mr Doug Shears, Chairman ICM Agribusiness group

Mr Doug Shears, the chairman of the ICM Agribusiness group

Statement, in the accompanying appendix, supports Sustainability and Economic outcomes.

This must be included in any Sustainability WA Submissions, as an example of **Business Opportunity** in Sustainability.

My concern is the WA Government status on GE food in WA should stop being ambiguous, and take a pro-active “Clean & Green” WA/Australia approach to economic rationalization of WA/Australia agriculture, rather than adopt the USA model of GE, and always coming last in the GE technology race with USA and massive big GE spenders.

We cannot beat others at their own GE game, so we should go with our best asset;ie, the perception and partial reality (yet to be completed holistically) that WA/Australia is “Clean & Green” and therefore a unique niche marketer for those affluent markets who seeks such guarantees.

Yours Sincerely,

GPK

The Age (Melbourne)

Modified food a risk to clean image: expert

One of Australia's leading agribusinessmen has called on the Federal Government to impose a moratorium on the introduction of genetically modified organisms into Australia's food chain, saying the nation's unique position in international markets is at risk of being undermined.

Mr Doug Shears, the chairman of the ICM Agribusiness group, said yesterday that the benefits of genetically modified food were unproven, and Australia was running the risk of "embracing a technology too early in an area where the costs to industry and the community may outweigh the benefits".

Mr Shears rose to prominence in the 1970s and '80s by building a stable of agriculture and food companies centred on the Uncle Tobys brand. He sold the business to Goodman Fielder in 1992 for \$330million in cash and shares and now controls a stable of agricultural and food companies including the Berri juice and citrus products group.

His comments come on the eve of the release by the Federal Government of a discussion paper about the implications of the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into Australia.

The paper has been prepared by Biotech Australia, the body set up by the Government in its last Budget to develop a national biotechnology strategy, and is believed to also canvass concerns that the introduction of GMOs into the food chain could compromise Australia's position in world markets.

Mr Shears said yesterday that consumers around the world were expressing concern about GM foods, and looking for countries that could supply them with conventional produce. "We should be listening to them. The advent of genetically engineered farming has the potential of wiping out an economic advantage," he said.

"Why shoot ourselves in the foot and destroy in an instant what we have worked hard over many years to secure, that being a positive image for our agricultural products?"

Agricultural producers are already reporting higher international sales on the back of concerns about GM food. Concerns in Europe about GM food are considered a major factor in a sharp increase in Australia's share of European imports of canola, for example, from 0.1 per cent in 1994-95 to 32.8 per cent in 1997-98.

There was "growing mistrust among consumers about a technology being foisted on them", Mr Shears said. He added that the recent extended debate about the identification of GM foodstuffs on labels "heightens the scepticism, because it assumes that genetically modified foods are a given".

Until the costs and benefits of the introduction of genetically modified organisms into Australia's agricultural production chain were fully debated, "the question of whether Australia should adopt the technology in agriculture and food production remains unanswered.

"I do not know what the long-term effects of this technology will be on our agriculture, on our farms, on our ecosystems. Nor, does it seem, does anyone else. Different opinions emerge almost daily, some in support, some in doubt. The point is, while the doubt persists, we should take a strategic pause and think about our future and our immediate opportunities.

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