

## Scientist distances himself from activists

---

Downloaded from <http://sl.farmonline.com.au/news/nationalrural/grains-and-cropping/cereal/scientist-distances-himself-from-activists/2239218.aspx?storypage=0>

COLIN BETTLES

28 Jul, 2011 04:00 AM

A US scientist has distanced himself from Greenpeace's anti-Genetically Modified wheat campaign in Australia, having previously co-signed a letter asking the CSIRO to abort research into the technology, over concerns with the rigor of human and animal testing.

Professor David Schubert from the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in San Diego, California, co-signed an open letter on 27 June to CSIRO Chief Executive Megan Clark, criticising proposed human trials of GM wheat, along with seven other doctors and scientists.

The letter was sent in the lead up to Greenpeace activists' destroying CSIRO's GM wheat field trials in Canberra on July 14 after entering the site illegally, in an effort to gain publicity for its flagging anti-GM wheat campaign.

Questions have also been raised about the letter's lack of independence and authenticity, amid accusations it was plagiarised from previous Greenpeace anti-GM propaganda.

Professor Schubert, a neurobiologist, denounced Greenpeace's attack on CSIRO's scientific work.

He told Rural Press, he did not approve of the "destructive actions taken by Greenpeace or any other anti-GM group".

Professor Schubert said the protest was "counterproductive in addition to being illegal".

"The decision to grow these crops should be based upon science, not threats from either side of the debate," he said.

"The latter is a major problem in the US."

Professor Schubert said he was not a member of Greenpeace but was opposed to feeding GM products to people, without genuine product safety testing in animals.

But CSIRO has already trialed the GM wheat on rats and pigs with no indication of negative effects.

The researcher has approval from the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) to conduct human trials and is awaiting further advice before moving ahead.

Two Australian based co-signatories to the letter, Dr Benjamin Ticehurst from Sydney and Dr George Crisp from Shenton Park in Perth, are members of Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA).

DEA is a voluntary organisation of medical doctors in Australia that says it works to prevent detrimental health outcomes caused by damage to the environment, globally.

Dr Ticehurst confirmed he was a co-signatory to the CSIRO letter.

But when asked if he supported or condoned the activists destroying the scientific trials said, "I have nothing to add regarding Greenpeace's tactics".

"At the risk of sounding like a politician, I don't wish to make a judgement on this question," he said.

Dr Crisp was a candidate for the Greens in the Perth metropolitan seat of Curtin at last year's Federal election, running against Federal deputy opposition leader, Julie Bishop who won by a large majority.

Dr Crisp was unavailable for comment regarding the CSIRO letter.

However one of the scientists, UK based Professor Carlo Leifert, from the Newcastle University School of Agriculture, ruled out distancing himself from the Greenpeace anti-GM wheat campaign.

Professor Leifert said he was not informed by Greenpeace beforehand that they intended to take such action; nor was he contacted by Greenpeace after the event to say what had taken place and provide an explanation.

He said he did not condone the destruction of the experimental crop but offered some sympathy to the cause.

"I can completely understand that Greenpeace felt that, in the current political climate, where it seems that the biotech industry can influence governments at will and very often against the wish of the people, they had no other choice but to destroy the crops," he said.

Rural Press contacted the other co-signatories to the letter, including Dr Michael Antoniou of the King's College London School of Medicine and Dr Vandana Shiva, Professor at the Navdanya Research Foundation for Science Technology and Ecology, a renowned global anti-GM campaigner.

However they did not return emails before deadline.

The letter said “feeding trials should not be conducted until long-term impact assessments have been undertaken and appropriate information released to enable the scientific community to determine the value of such research, as against the risks.”

Karl Haro von Mogel, a graduate student in plant genetics at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, US, believes the letter was plagiarised, indicating Greenpeace was “scraping the bottom of the barrel” to drum up criticism of the GM wheat trials.

Mr Haro von Mogel is the co-executive editor of Biofortified.org, a website which aims to foster factual, civil dialogue on genetic engineering in agriculture which he says is independent and not supported by any companies.

Mr Haro von Mogel said Greenpeace produced the letter as part of a concerted media strategy to give the impression that the scientific and medical community widely condemned the wheat research being conducted at CSIRO.

But he said by exaggerating the risks of genetic engineering in the letter and in other documents they released, Greenpeace set the stage for “breaking into CSIRO to destroy the plots of GE wheat”.

He said not only was this scientific veneer “thin on evidence and signatories” but much of the letter was merely copied from a different letter penned against trials of pro-vitamin-A enhanced rice or Golden Rice.

Mr Haro von Mogel said the letter also failed to mention Greenpeace's involvement “giving the false impression that this letter was an independent act”.

“One of the signatories has even come out against their act of vandalism, adding to the chorus of condemnation from the scientific community around the world,” he said.

“Greenpeace thought that they could engineer public support for their position but instead they just mowed down what moral arguments they had left.”

Greenpeace spokesman, James Lorenz, said any strong similarities to the Golden Rice letter was due to scientists making reference to “well established and respected protocols for the testing of experimental products on humans”.

“We certainly didn't write the letter,” he said.

“We are campaigning against GM wheat.

“But it's a long bow to assert we are manufacturing opposition...it's not as though GM doesn't have opponents outside our office.

“GM wheat has been rejected in Europe, Russia, Canada etc.

“We certainly didn't push the Canadian Farmers Union to reject it.”

Editor-in-Chief of literary science magazine, COSMOS, Wilson da Silva, said no GM wheat had been approved for human consumption in Australia but the CSIRO did have permission to conduct trials.

He said Greenpeace had “lost its way”.

“What was so ‘toxic’ about this wheat strain that it had to be destroyed?” he said.

“Its genes had been modified to lower its glycemic index and boost fibre content, creating bread and other wheat products that would improve bowel health and nutritional value.

“Its former glory rested on the righteousness of its actions in support of real evidence of how humanity was failing to care for the environment.

“Now it is a sad, dogmatic, reactionary phalanx of anti-science zealots who care not for evidence, but for publicity.”

At least three Greenpeace activists used whipper-snippers to cause about \$300,000 damage to the CSIRO GM wheat trials in Canberra; the matter is now under police investigation.

The Australian Federal Police executed a search warrant at the Greenpeace head offices in Sydney last week, with a range of items and property seized as evidence during the raid.

Part of that evidence will undergo forensic analysis and the warrant follows on from police interviews of two persons of interest in Sydney last week.

On Monday, AFP said investigations were ongoing, with charges yet to be laid.

The Gene Technology Act 2000, under which the trials are conducted, sets out a maximum penalty of two year imprisonment for anyone found guilty of damaging or interfering with approved GM trials and associated facilities.

Gene Technology Regulator, Dr Joe Smith, has declined to comment while the issue is under investigation.

Greenpeace issued a media statement publicising the police raid.

In it, Greenpeace Head of Campaigns, Steve Campbell, said "As an organisation that stands-up for transparency, Greenpeace is open to scrutiny”.

“This action has stirred up heated debate and it’s about time,” he said.

“Greenpeace is demanding that the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, urgently increase funding for the CSIRO, so that our public science agency stops having its strings pulled by billion-dollar foreign biotech corporations.”

Rural Press contact Ms Gillard’s office but her office declined to comment on a matter under police investigation.

FarmOnline

Source: <http://www.farmonline.com>

Share on

Facebook Tweet on

Twitter Email to  
a friendcomments

Date: Newest first | Oldest firstThere you have it...the best science money can buy...

Posted by clean food, 28/07/2011 11:08:05 AM@clean food - it never ceases to amaze me how as soon as anyone questions the lawyers at Greenpeace about their science then they are corrupt!  
I guess its part of the whole bullying, insulting, crop burning approach that Greenpeace is famous for.

Thank god they are there to tell us what is good for us. When do I get to vote for these moral guardians of our world again??