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Re:Review on EPRs and PBRs

We grow wheat, sorghum, chickpea, mung beans and summer and winter forages in the Central Highlands and Maranoa districts of Queensland.

The breeding of new wheat varieties in Queensland is still done primarily by government agencies funded by QDPI (public funds) and GRDC (grower funds from levies).

This system has worked well in the past because of some committed industry people – plant breeders and growers willing to participate in the initial breeding and propagation of new varieties which are subsequently sold to merchants – the holders of the PBR - who then build up commercial supplies and market them.

The case in Queensland is that the holder of the PBRs have not been involved in the physical development of new varieties.

Unless this changes, PBRs will do nothing for Queensland wheatgrowers, the plant breeding industry or the communities that it now supports.

There appears to have been a greater uptake of private enterprise plant breeding in other states and with barley, oats and pasture seeds.

Farm Saved Seed.

Section 17 of the PBR act is vital to the long term sustainability of wheat growing. It is especially important for growers in the more marginal areas.

1. The cost of seed is becoming a major concern to growers eg our situation this year – intended plant area 2100 ha of wheat would use 75 tonnes of seed. To keep the seed has cost around \$300/tonne. To purchase the seed at \$800/t + \$40 freight leaves a difference of \$40 500.

I have been told by a trader that oats seed was being purchased from a seedgrower for \$300/tonne and being resold after grading and bagging for \$1500/tonne. If this is the case then it is extortion and a misuse of the PBR Act.

2. Certainty of availability. Carryover cost to merchants means that they usually make sure they hold only enough seed for an expected sowing area. If some has to be replanted or good rains mean that a larger area is planted, then seed runs out (as it did this year because of replanting), this could be devastating to individual growers.

With farmers keeping their own seed they have any carry over costs but more importantly have an assured supply.

I would suggest that most breaches of the PBR act come about when merchants have run out of seed and there is a transfer of excess farm stored seed to those growers short of seed. The prospect of not planting and losing a year's income is not an option for grain growers.

3. Quality seed with good germination, vigour, purity, and varietal trueness is very important. With farm saved seed the grower can have control over all these seed quality attributes. While most seed merchants sell good quality seed it is not always possible to have control over all these factors.

I have heard reports of pasture seed from reputable suppliers having a germination of 3%.

In 2005 we purchased Lang wheat seed – every handful had up to 6 seeds of sorghum and 1-2 seeds of corn distributed through the 7 tonne of seed.

**The holders of the PBR should have some obligations put on them to ensure that quality is not lowered in the interests of profit taking.

EPR

There are, on the list of 2007 Wheat Varieties for Qld, 22 varieties of which 18 have PBR and 16 EPR. In a few years there will be no varieties without EPR on them. This means that at delivery point every variety will attract an EPR. There would be no incentive, or need, to make false claims about variety which is the basis of most criticisms of EPR.

If the PBR Act were altered to allow grower to grower seed sales of PBR seed of grain varieties, this would actually help in the uptake of new varieties which are agronomically suitable to the various growing areas, which at present are restricted by availability of seed and a resistance by growers to try new varieties with high input costs.

Malcolm Crocker