

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS - MORATORIUM

1157. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

In light of today's announcement by the New South Wales and Victorian governments that they are ending their moratorium on genetically modified canola crops -

- (1) Will the Western Australian government now follow suit?
- (2) If not, why not?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Barry House for his question.

- (1) The Western Australian government will not follow suit on the actions of New South Wales and Victoria.
- (2) The reasons have been quite clearly outlined. The Labor government was elected on a platform of a moratorium that was strongly supported by a committee report of this house. We intend to maintain that moratorium. I remind honourable members that the report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs was in fact supported by all five parties that comprised that committee. The moratorium is well founded. The moratorium is an opportunity for this state to learn a little more about the effect of GMs, to give consumers some time to get used to the idea of GMs and to determine whether they are something that consumers, both in Western Australia and internationally, actually desire to consume. However, since the honourable member has asked me about the New South Wales decision in particular - I cannot say much about the Victorian decision because there has been very little publicity about it, probably understandably - the bit of information that I could get was an Australian Associated Press media line from Sydney today. It gave out the startling information that the New South Wales Minister for Primary Industries, my friend Ian Macdonald, has indicated that the legislation he will introduce into the New South Wales Parliament to lift the moratorium will also contain a proposal to set up an expert committee to determine whether segregation between GM and non-GM crops will work in New South Wales. That is a bit scary, because we must ask ourselves what will happen if the committee decides that segregation will not work. This is precisely what Canada never tried to do with canola, and what the United States tried to do but gave up in frustration within 12 months. With canola in particular, it is very difficult to segregate GM and non-GM crops. Given that this technology is effectively irreversible once it has been released, that means that the state of New South Wales has been condemned to be, in respect at least of canola, a supplier to an undifferentiated commodity market forever. It will be out there competing with the Canadians until such time as New South Wales farmers stop growing canola. I do not know whether Western Australian farmers in particular would think that was a clever thing to do.