

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS, MORATORIUM

**826. Hon NIGEL HALLETT to the Minister for Agriculture and Forestry:**

If the minister has no confidence in the science-based decisions of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, why did he agree to the threshold levels set at the last Primary Industries Ministerial Council meeting; and, as the minister has agreed to these thresholds and the establishment of the most comprehensive regulatory process in the world for this industry, why will he not acknowledge that a moratorium on the growing of genetically modified crops in Western Australia is no longer required?

**Hon KIM CHANCE replied:**

I thank Hon Nigel Hallett for providing some notice of the question.

The question makes two rather cheeky assumptions: one, that I have no confidence in the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator; and, two, that the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator makes science-based decisions. Leaving those two reservations aside, I have an answer that is not too lengthy. However, I note Mr President's reluctance, and members obviously have further questions -

**The PRESIDENT:** No, no.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** I will table the answer, because it is somewhat technical, and seek the leave of the house for its incorporation in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The following material was incorporated -

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1. The Primary Industries Ministerial Council considered the current GM presence in the context of market-related risks not the public health and environment safety considerations that are the jurisdiction of the Gene Technology Regulator. The agreement by the Council members to establish nationally consistent defined threshold levels for non-GM canola was essential to provide confidence to the canola industry, including producers, marketers and their customers.
2. The agreement represents a holding position and provides the time to address the problem and clean up the entire system from the seed produced by the plant breeders through to the exported grain.
3. the Government is still of the view that the growing of Genetically Modified (GM) canola crops in Western Australia will impact negatively on the State's export markets. The PIMC decision in no way affects the existing moratorium on the commercial production of GM crops. It does however recognize the reality that a very low level of contamination of Western Australia's canola crop has occurred. This has resulted in the necessity for me to issue an order under the *Genetically Modified Crops (Free Areas) Act 2004* that will allow the states canola farmers to deliver grain with up to 0.9% GM contamination and to plant seed with up to 0.5% GM contamination.

It is important to note that the decision taken at PIMC permits the states to pursue complete freedom from GM canola over time. Certainly this is the intention of the WA Government.

Importantly the recent advice about possible wide spread low level GM contamination has highlighted the need for seed supply chains into WA to be reformed so that the sloppy practices of the past that have led to this contamination - albeit at low levels - are not continued into the future. The Western Australian government through the Department of Agriculture is currently in the process of designing systems and testing regimes in consultation with industry to improve the states performance in this regard.

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