GENETICALLY MODIFIED CANOLA - COMMERCIAL FIELD TRIALS

Motion

Resumed from 30 August.

MR G. SNOOK (Moore) [4.01 pm]: Since I moved this motion a fortnight ago I have received numerous e-mails, telephone calls and personal approaches in support of the motion and what it endeavours to achieve. I will be frank. Some of the people who have contacted me offering support have also commented on concerns they hold about the long-term implications from companies that produce genetically modified seed in their role as producers and growers of grain. The comments have all been positive. I have not had any negative feedback about what this motion intends to do; that is, to undertake full-scale commercial trials of genetically modified canola for next year's season. As I said previously, the object is to ascertain the pros and cons, test the claims and counterclaims of both sides of the argument, work out the benefits and resolve the concerns held by a variety of people, including growers. Growers themselves are expressing concern about what it means to them. The only way we will be able to move forward and get a clear pathway is by holding commercial trials in an isolated part of the state and making scientific and accurate assessments in a balanced way.

This motion has certainly drawn a response. The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Kim Chance, initially came out strongly against this proposition, stating that it would not be allowed to go ahead, primarily because the premium price Australian growers receive for their non-GM canola could be jeopardised. In fact, that premium price, as I explained to the house last time I spoke, is the result of a number of circumstances and not principally because our canola is GM-free. We have a drought in Australia and there is increasing production in Canada. Canada exports GM canola oil to the European Union for biodiesel production. Biodiesel production in the United Kingdom is rising at a dramatic rate and the demand is enormous. Its rapeseed and other oilseed crops are increasing in area and are in high demand. When we view how that impacts on countries such as Australia, we see it is a de facto trade barrier or tariff regime on countries that have the product to export. It is worth noting that it is a convenient opportunity for European Union countries to take advantage of the issue and say they are GM-free, although that is true only in part because some countries in the European Union and in Europe grow GM canola. Spain is one of those countries and Portugal is another. In fact, this year GM crops will also be planted in Poland and Romania.

Not only that, the European Union at this very moment - this fortnight - is reviewing its ban on the importation of GM canola seed. Previously it was not allowed to be grown and there were certain other laws and regulations relating to GM products and food. Essentially, the EU has said it is prepared to accept GM Roundup Ready canola for importation in seed form into Europe. Currently that is not the case. The reason is the demand for biodiesel arising from the energy crisis the EU is facing as a result of the high cost of fossil fuels. The opportunities and the issues facing us as producers in Australia are changing dramatically. My view, and that of the Liberal Party, is that if we do not get a rattle on and get ourselves into gear to move the debate forward, with all its risks - there are risks, but that is what farming and other business is about - we will not ascertain the facts and alleviate some of the concerns or prove the success or otherwise of this product.

To give an indication of what is happening in Europe, it is currently the world's largest producer of biodiesel. In response to that growing demand, production capacity is increasing and is expected to exceed 13.5 million metric tonnes by 2010. That has a value of 400 million euros, or half a billion Canadian dollars. That is the amount being invested into expanding the biofuel and biodiesel industries. The scope of the market for that product is enormous. It will not be a flash in the pan and it will not end easily or quickly.

It is interesting that the minister has now said he will give consideration to approving the trialling of GM canola for the purpose of biodiesel production provided he can be guaranteed that it will not disadvantage the premium price. As I said, the premium is really a product of circumstances and not related to the canola being GM-free. That needs to be clearly understood.

To sum up, our proposal will test whether out-crossing, yield benefits and weed management are issues. Fuel savings will be tested for their benefits. A very important aspect from an environmental point of view is herbicide resistance. There is no question that herbicide usage drops dramatically with GM crops. That was clearly shown in the cotton industry. People say that cotton is a fibre and not a food. That is wrong, wrong, wrong. We eat a portion of GM cotton seed oil in many products. On a daily basis we consume a mixture of palm oil, canola oil and also GM canola oil. Therein lies the answer to the question.

DR G.G. JACOBS (Roe) [4.10 pm]: I thank members for the opportunity to speak on such an important motion. We often imagine awful things about gene technology. We must dispel some of the concerns people have about the genetically modified organisms and crops that currently exist. I will share with the house some basic information about gene technology and what is happening in the field of genetic modification. Members

know that DNA is the genetic material that is contained in every living organism. All people, plants, and every other living thing contain DNA, which is a blueprint for life. That blueprint is made up of microscopic beads that form a double helix. The DNA beads - the nucleotides - are formed in a certain sequence, which determines the sequence of the genes. The sequence of the genes determines what we are, how we are made, what enzymes we have and what proteins we make. It is the complete blueprint of life. The complete set of these genes in the DNA is called the genome. It is particularly relevant how this DNA strand - the sequence of beads - determines certain protein production. In a cell - I am talking about it from a microscopic perspective - the DNA beads and the sequence of the DNA determines a particular sequence of amino acids that produces a particular protein. Proteins are particularly useful in the production of cells, including heart cells, plant cells, muscle cells, and enzymes, which are very important in the engine room where animals and plants make energy.

Within that cell is what is called "messenger" ribonucleic acid - RNA. That is like a bead that moves on the other beads. As it moves, it determines the sequence of amino acids that make a protein. This sequence is very important in determining the particular traits of a living thing. Genes can contain a formula needed by a cell to produce protein. The proteins are complex molecules formed in a chain in an organism. The amino acids in those chains have a variety of roles. The types of proteins include structural proteins, as I have mentioned, and enzymes that carry out many of the processes in plant and animal life. A plant can then convert sunlight and carbon dioxide into energy, which is the basic process of all living plants.

I will clarify and expand upon the sequence of the beads of the DNA chain. Genetic modification involves the copying and transferring of genes from one organism to another. A particular sequence of beads in a genome can be altered. It is the alteration of the genome that is the foundation for gene modification. The genetic modification involving the copying and transferring of a set of genes from one organism to another is possible because the genetic code is universal. The DNA of all organisms is made up of the same building blocks - the basis of which is the beads I have talked about - and is decoded by the messenger RNA into protein. That process is conducted in the same way in all living organisms. Once a DNA sequence that codes for a particular characteristic in one organism has been identified, it is possible to transfer a copy of that DNA sequence into another organism and to incorporate that into the bead structure. That is what genetically modified organisms are all about. Once a gene becomes incorporated into a genome of the recipient organism, the resulting organism is considered to be genetically modified. The new characteristic coded by that gene will be inherited by subsequent generations.

I will give members an example involving one of the first GM foods to be approved for sale in Australia. As the member for Moore said, irrespective of what we believe, we are probably already ingesting some of these foods, and we have not grown horns.

Mr G. Snook: Twenty-six GM products have already been licensed.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I thank the member. One of the first GM foods to be approved in Australia and New Zealand was corn that was modified to be resistant to insect pests. It is referred to, as the member for Moore would know, as Bt corn. It is named Bt corn because of the insect resistant system that has been incorporated into the GM corn plant, which has been derived from *Bacillus thuringiensis* - Bt. This bacterium is universally found in soil. We are not talking about something from outer space but something that is already contained in soil. The insect resistant gene sequence was taken from that bacterium and put into the DNA chain - the genome - of the corn. The corn then acquired insect resistance. The Bt bacterium naturally produces a number of crystal proteins. The messenger RNA of that bacterium runs along the DNA bead and produces a particular protein. The protein in that bacterium happens to produce a crystal toxin that is toxic to certain insects. The GM plants with Bt have been genetically modified to contain one or more genes from the Bt - the bacillus - that produces crystal proteins. The modified plants produce one or more types of Bt crystal protein in the leaves, stems, roots and other plant tissue of that plant. The susceptible insects then eat the plant and are poisoned. I can already hear some members say that if we eat it, we will be poisoned. Most of the crystal proteins are toxic only to particular groups of insects, such as butterflies, moths and beetles that eat the corn and destroy the farmers' corn crops. The proteins are not toxic to any other insects or living organisms; they are harmless to humans. A Food Standards Australia New Zealand article on GM foods states -

> Bt proteins derived directly from the soil bacterium have a long history of safe use as a natural insecticide.

We should all read this article. It is a very good summary of the whole process. Later I will address some of the importantly asked questions about GM products. It continues -

> Particular varieties of Bt corn have been through the FSANZ safety assessment process, and are approved for sale in Australia and New Zealand.

Bt corn could be resistant to insects, have a resistance to certain chemicals or a resistance to salt. How exciting is that - a plant that can be GM modified to have some degree of salt resistance? How about a gene that is put into this DNA strand from another organism that confers resistance to frost? How exciting is that? That has enormous implications for agriculture production throughout the world and in this state in particular, very importantly.

Mr G. Snook: So your constituents would have lost millions?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Absolutely. Frost is one of the big causes of grain crop losses in Western Australia.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Especially out your way.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The member for Cottesloe never fails to remind me of our temperatures, quite ill-advisedly. Mr Acting Speaker (Mr P.B. Watson), you are from the southern parts as well. Every time I see the member for Cottesloe and mention Esperance, he starts shivering and says it is the coldest place on earth. I say, "No, it's not; there is the Antarctic." A resistant frost gene in Antarctic grass can be conferred into another plant, whether it be wheat, canola or any other recipient.

That is a very rough guide as to what happens when producing genetically modified organisms. We might ask: what is wrong with what we do now? Why not do it naturally like we have always done, as though this is something very unnatural? I suggest that the very long, tortuous process of normal plant breeding is one where we almost wait for a trait to be exhibited. We wait for a genotype, which is the genetic material, to exhibit itself in the living organism - in its phenotype. There have been processes that take a plant and subject it to all sorts of different stressors and conditions and wait for one plant to pop up and survive that particular stressful situation, almost in a mutagenic way. We are waiting for something to be expressed abnormally. That expression is then taken and bred from and bred from until we have a new breed. This process may take many, many years. It may take 20 or 30 years. Even the genetically modified organism process could take 10 years. That is why it is so important to recognise what the member for Moore is saying.

While we ignore GM technology in the mistaken belief that it will somehow produce a Frankenstein syndrome, we are losing in this state and we are dropping behind the rest of the world. We also have a lead time to develop these GM organisms. The member for Moore probably does not know that I had a very heated debate with a farmer from Southern Cross when we were there. He was saying, "You Liberals support GM technology. It's terrible. It will produce all these difficulties. We're going to lose our non-GM premium." As I have said, we believe the non-GM premium is an absolute fallacy. A non-GM premium - I think the member for Moore has already said this - is probably $10 a tonne for 10 per cent of the crop, which across the whole crop is $1 a tonne.

Very shortly I will talk about the experience in 1998 of choosing an absolute loser of a breed called Karoo. The selection of that breed was an absolute disaster.

Mr P.D. Omodei: That was a cross-breed.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Absolutely. It was a disaster because of the composition of the oils. It was a disaster because of the erucic acid which I will talk about later. It is highly monitored and looked for by Food Standards Australia New Zealand. That decision actually created demand because of the shortages. Those shortages drove the prices we are talking about. It is a spurious inflation to say that that creates a premium. That premium was created by poor breed selection and that created a demand that drove the market.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I wish to share another experience. I went to an Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Research Economics conference in Borden. A Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation scientist gave a talk on clean green sustainable agriculture. He said that consumers today are more and more concerned about what they are buying, and they want to follow the chain of production. They want to know how a product is produced all the way through to appearing on the dinner table. When he talked about clean, safe and sustainable agriculture, I asked a very important question. I believe it was the most important question asked at the conference. Other people may not have thought so but I thought it was. I asked: are genetically modified organisms consistent with clean, safe, sustainable agriculture? He said, "Do you want one word or an explanation?" I said, "I'll just have one word to start with." He said, "Yes."

As the member for Moore has said previously, we have farmers in our electorates. A Salmon Gums farmer who had a particularly bad year came to see me and he was quite depressed. I said to him, "Vince, how did it go this year?" He has two boys. They go 24/7 - they work around the clock. They planted 20 000 acres of wheat. I think the crop went two or three bags an acre. That is an old term. I am sorry about that. I identify with that. I think the member for Moore would identify with a two or three-bag crop. A two-bag crop is a disaster. It means the farmer is going out the gate and is in the red. I said to him, "Did you make any money?" He said, "No. We

worked 24/7, three blokes, all season." They actually sprayed the crop five times. They were not using an insecticide; they were using a herbicide. The herbicide will gain a weed kill. All wheat farmers know that weeds are the biggest thing that will reduce, other than frost and all the other things, the yield of the crop. The weeds take the nutrients and nothing is left for the crop. They sprayed a total of 100 000 acres. If it was not for weeds, it was for insects. We need a knockdown canola. By that, I mean canola that has been genetically modified to have a resistance to a particular chemical; for example, Roundup Ready. Roundup Ready is what we call a knockdown herbicide. When it is put on crops, it knocks the weeds and, as the member for Moore has said, in the Canadian experience, that is it; no weeds, no more boom spraying, one knockdown spray. The genetically modified genetic trait that is implanted in this DNA bead confers a resistance in the canola to Roundup Ready. Under normal circumstances, if Roundup Ready is sprayed on a traditional canola crop, it will kill not only the weeds, but also the crop. The gene that has been developed confers a resistance on the canola to Roundup Ready. The crop is sprayed, the weeds die and the canola continues to grow. More importantly, the crop does not need to be boom sprayed every four weeks to kill the weeds. Therefore, it reduces costs and is a much safer farming process.

Mr G. Snook: It is better for the environment, too.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: It is environmentally cleaner and greener. That is one of the reasons the CSIRO scientist at the Borden conference of the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics said that it is consistent with clean, safe, sustainable agriculture. There are many examples; I have just used that as one.

I want to share with members some frequently asked questions because some people on the other side of the chamber have real concerns. I hope that going through a little bit of the science has taken the myth and the mystique out of it. We are not talking about wacko scientists working in a laboratory producing Frankenstein. It is a very controlled environment. The process is clear; it achieves what it is designed to do.

In the time I have left I will try to dispel some of the concerns that members have. I refer again to the Food Standards Australia New Zealand document on GM Foods and the section on frequently asked questions. What if I eat DNA in a GM food? The answer is that we eat DNA everyday. We eat the strands of all these living organisms, whether they be plant or animal. It is completely natural and completely harmless, and is in everything we eat. The digestive system, with all its enzymes and acids, breaks down the DNA strand into little bits; otherwise we could not absorb them. We cannot absorb large chains of protein. The building blocks of protein are amino acids - they are the little bits. They chop it up and then we can absorb it, in small molecules, into our blood stream. The digestive system digests all DNA in exactly the same way. It cannot tell the difference between a DNA and a naturally produced food - sometimes the feeling on the other side of the house is that GM is an unnaturally produced food. The digestive system cannot differentiate between the DNA from GMOs and any other DNA. If people eat DNA in GM food or in conventional food, it will not change their DNA or the DNA of their children.

Next question: What about allergens in GM food? Most foods do not cause any allergy in most people. However, one in 50 or so people have a food allergy of some sort. They are allergic, essentially, to the proteins - those chains of amino acids, which sometimes cause an unusual immune reaction. If conventional food that contains allergens is genetically modified, the GM food may contain those allergens, just as the conventional food does. For example, soy naturally contains proteins that cause an allergic reaction in some people. Unless these specific proteins are removed, they will also be found in GM soy varieties. In addition to that, there is an overarching watchdog. If the Food Standards Australia New Zealand had scientific evidence that a new protein in a GM food was allergenic, it is unlikely that the food containing that protein would be given approval, as would be the case for a conventional food. Therefore, I do not believe there is any myth, or any mystique, or any hidden agenda there.

What about toxins in GM foods? All foods, both natural and GM, are toxic at some dose. However, substances classed as toxins are those that can be harmful to health at typical levels of exposure. A number of different toxins are found naturally in various foods: for example, glycoalkaloids which are found in green potatoes - the member for Warren-Blackwood would know more about that than I do; fungal toxins that sometimes contaminate food; glucosinolates in cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli; erucic acid in some canolas - the one that was found in the Karoo variety was very high in erucic acid; psoralens in celery; and obviously substances and poisons that we know are in mushrooms. The toxic substances are naturally present in many conventional foods that are subsequently genetically modified. For example, both GM and conventional varieties of canola naturally contain erucic acid, and there is a limit on the amount of that acid that is allowed in foods derived from canola. Erucic acid is not a feature necessarily of GM canola. It is found in some varieties of conventional canola. In the end, if the safety assessment by Food Standards Australia New Zealand suggested a new protein in GM food

was a toxin and might result in adverse health effects at levels of expected dietary intake, the GM product would not be approved for sale in Australia or New Zealand, just as it would not be approved for a conventional food.

As I have only two minutes left, I suggest to members that another important question is: what about the herbicide and pesticide residues in GM crops? If members reflect on my scenario of the Salmon Gums farmer and how much herbicide and insecticide he had to use, I suggest that the GM modified variety is much less likely to contain dangerous levels of herbicide and pesticide. Even if herbicide or pesticide use were changed because crops were modified to tolerate these chemicals, the food sold in Australia would not contain unsafe levels of residue. In most cases, the level of herbicide and pesticide used in genetically modified crops may be significantly reduced. Of course, there is also the issue of whether GM foods will be safe in the long term. Will a new food product be safe in the long term? The same guidelines and assessments will apply to that food product as apply to conventional or GM foods. We have nothing to fear. Over the long term, a balanced diet of nutritious food is probably more important than the level of any one particular herbicide or pesticide. A group of farmers in the south east zone in my region have supported the concept of conducting a commercial trial of GM canola under certain conditions, and that would be consistent with this motion. I support the motion.

MR M.P. WHITELY (Bassendean - Parliamentary Secretary) [4.40 pm]: The government will oppose the motion because it calls on the government to abandon a highly successful policy and to allow commercial trialling of GM canola in Western Australia. The key point is the word "commercial", and I will get to that in a moment. The government's policy is designed for the present and the future. Presently, the moratorium on commercial trials, not on small-scale trials, protects the two advantages that we have. The first is a price advantage in international markets and the second is market access. International markets like our non-GM product and they are prepared to pay a premium for it. One need go no further than the Liberal Party's policy document to acknowledge that there is currently a market premium for non-GM canola. It states that there is some evidence of occasional small premiums of 10 per cent for non-GM canola. The Liberal Party got it right in that there is a premium, but it got the figure wrong. The latest figures produced by the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food indicate that, as at 16 May 2006, there was a premium of about $A60 a tonne for Western Australian canola.

Mr P.D. Omodei: To where?

Mr M.P. WHITELY: The graph outlines canola price comparisons between Australian states and Winnipeg canola futures in Australian dollars per tonne. It refers to the Western Australian, Victorian, New South Wales and South Australian markets compared with Canadian markets. All the Australian markets attract a figure of about $420 because of our non-GM status, as opposed to the Vancouver market that attracts a price of $360. That is a premium of $60 a tonne, or about 17 per cent. The Liberal Party policy document acknowledges that there is a premium. However, the current premium is closer to $60 a tonne, or about 17 per cent, and is not terribly close to 10 per cent.

Mr G. Snook: The figures are wrong.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: The member can take up that argument with the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food. I am happy to table the graph, which was obviously produced after 16 May 2006.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Can you table it now so that we can look at it?

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Yes, I will table it now so that members can look at it.

[See paper 1835.]

Mr M.P. WHITELY: The Liberal Party policy document also acknowledges that there is a market access advantage into Europe of 10 per cent of our non-GM canola market. However, the Liberal Party is asking us to take a punt on an uncertain future. Although the Liberal Party acknowledges that there is a premium for our product and that we would be denied access to markets if we did not have our GM-free status, it is prepared to abandon all that and take a risk for virtually no gain. The government's policy is one for the future. If markets move, we are ready. We are prepared to allow small-scale field trials. The government policy protects the current advantage and allows for research into an uncertain future. The Liberal Party's policy would give away the current advantages of the price premium and market access and would gamble on an uncertain future for no gain.

A couple of questions need to be asked that were not satisfactorily answered by the member for Moore when I asked him last week. What does the Liberal Party propose with a commercial trial? What will constitute a commercial trial? Is it talking about 10 hectares, 40 hectares, 1 000 hectares or 30 000 hectares? More fundamentally, what does it expect to learn from a large-scale broadacre trial that it cannot learn from a small-scale field trial? There are two forms of vital information that can be gained from a small-scale field trial. We

can get yield information from a small-scale field trial by comparing non-GM canola with GM canola grown in identical conditions, and we can do an appropriate, controlled, scientifically valid analysis of whether there are increased yields in a small-scale trial. Secondly, we need to know how far non-GM canola crops need to be segregated from GM crops to prevent cross-contamination? That information can be obtained from using different non-GM varieties of canola. That information can be gained without going to the extent of a full-scale commercial GM trial. What is the motivation of the Liberal Party in calling for full-scale commercial trials, when the information can be obtained within the scope of the current policy?

Obviously growers will not be the beneficiaries of the Liberal Party's policy. It begs the question: why should we risk the advantages of our price premium and access to new markets? Why would we abandon a policy that is working? The Liberal Party would simply be giving up the advantages of the price premium and access to markets for no benefit. The government's policy allows for flexibility, whereas the Liberals want to jump in on trust. They are saying that there is a bright new future. The member for Moore has acknowledged it; he said that there are risks, but that the potential benefits are so great that we need to jump in and take those risks. However, the government is saying that the benefits can be assessed by having small-scale trials, without jumping in and risking the price premium and access to markets.

To date only one application has been received under the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003, and, unfortunately, that application was withdrawn for commercial reasons. The agriculture department is currently working with a proponent for a small-scale trial near Esperance. One of the essential aspects that make this trial appealing is that it is a small-scale trial. It proposes to use in the order of six or seven hectares and to compare the yields of both GM and non-GM crops, rather than just relying on information from overseas, which is often motivated by commercial interests. That analysis can be done in Western Australia under controlled conditions. We can assess the possibility of spontaneous generations of both GM and non-GM crops. There are good aspects to the proposed trial. The second aspect of the trial is that its small-scale nature will allow us to have a one-kilometre buffer from any other crop. That buffer will ensure that there are no problems with cross-contamination. The third and probably the most crucial aspect of this trial is that the product will be contained on site. The agriculture department will have a biodiesel plant on site, and neither the GM crop nor the non-GM crop will need to be moved off site; therefore, any contamination can be contained. The biggest risk with a commercial operation is the risk of the product entering the supply chain. The supply chain would be corrupted by contamination, which would lead to Western Australia losing its current price and market access advantage.

The Minister for Agriculture and Food will consider this trial when the proposal is put to him. The early signs are very encouraging; it appears to be a real trial with proper risk management. In fact, I suggest it goes further than risk management because it has adequate buffers and the product is contained on site and is not entering the supply chain thus risking contamination. It actually lends itself to risk elimination and is therefore a sensible approach to this proposition. It is a real trial with proper risk management.

We must ask ourselves what the possible benefits could be from allowing a large-scale commercial trial in which genetically modified canola is allowed to enter the supply chain. In reality there is none. There would be an increased field contamination risk, although we could probably limit the problem by having a one-kilometre buffer around a broadacre trial. A large trial could probably overcome the problem of buffers, although it would be more difficult to control, as a larger area would require a larger buffer. However, we cannot eliminate the supply-chain risk until we are prepared to set up an entirely separate supply chain infrastructure, which is a ridiculous proposition. We cannot eliminate this contamination risk. Contamination will happen and we will lose our price premium and our no-GM reputation. If we were to attempt it and made some feeble attempt at segregation, which would lead to an increase in costs, we would face the legal liability issue in addition to the risk of contamination. What would happen if the crops of non-GM growers were contaminated? They would not be too pleased about that, or about getting $60 a tonne less from their markets. There are therefore issues of legal liability, contamination and the increase in the cost of segregating the crops in an attempt to fix the problem. The issue of legal liability would arise due to the contamination of non-GM crops and the loss of access to the premium market.

There is a further point. Let us suppose a grower allows a life science company to run its GM trials. There is no incentive for that company to run them properly. In fact, it would be in the company's best interests if cross-contamination of crops occurred. It is not beyond the realm of possibility for a life science company to conduct a poorly run broadacre trial. A poorly run trial would almost certainly lead to contamination. The company could then come into the market as an equal player and Western Australia would lose its non-GM status and therefore its marketing edge. The company would benefit by dragging the market down.

Our policy is a term-of-government policy. It allows time to prove up GM crops on a controlled trial basis. We appreciate that we do not have the full picture about GM crops and we appreciate that in the long term there may be benefits from GM canola and other GM crops. That is why we are allowing small-scale trials. As was

mentioned by members opposite, there is the potential for different yields from GM crops and for less reliance on pesticides etc. However, there are a couple of certainties. One is the certainty of a technology fee. The life science companies will not give us this technology for nothing, so there will be an increased cost by way of a technology fee. There is also the absolute certainty that we would be committed to the life science companies as suppliers of seeds and sprays. They operate in a vertically integrated market in which they control not only the seeds but also the products that go with them, such as sprays and the like. They would have to be not only paid a technology fee but also guaranteed our reliance on their products.

Life science companies will have an opportunity to prove up their products, as we will allow small-scale trials along the lines of those I outlined. As I said, the proposed trial near Esperance is very promising. At the moment, however, the international markets are telling us that there is resistance to GM products. That may or may not be for good reason; nonetheless, the reality is the perception. The fact that the international markets are prepared to pay more for non-GM canola and other non-GM crops indicates that there is a market advantage to Western Australia's no-GM status. It is not just the canola industry that acknowledges this problem. The marketing agents for Barley Australia and the Australian Wheat Board recognise that there is no market acceptance of GM grains. Both have stated that their markets do not want GM grains, and it is not just them.

Let us go back to the issue of canola. The Western Australian Farmers Federation policy statement, which was issued in February 2006, completely supports the current government policy. It says -

> WAFarmers supports continued well contained trialled research into GMOs including (subject to the adequate resolution of legal liability issues to protect existing industries) the establishment of farmers sized trials of up to 10 hectares of GM Canola in the Esperance district to provide a clear indication of the benefits or otherwise of GM Canola grown in WA conditions.
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> WAFarmers supports the lifting of the current State Government moratorium on the commercial release of GMOs when markets clearly indicate their preparedness to accept GM produce.

That is this government's policy now and for the future; that is, farmers can conduct trials of up to 10 hectares. Our policy could have been written by the Western Australian Farmers Federation, which says that it will support the lifting of the current state government moratorium on the commercial release of GMOs when markets clearly indicate their preparedness to accept GM produce. Markets have not done that; in fact, they have done the opposite. Markets are paying a premium because they like our non-GM products. Why jump ahead of the game into an uncertain future when we still have that option ahead of us?

Trevor de Landgrafft commented on the issue in *The West Australian* on 30 August -

> . . . the moratorium, which restricts trial to crops of less than 1ha, should be relaxed to allow trials of up to 40ha, but commercial trials were not yet supported.

He said that commercial trials were not yet supported, which flies directly in the face of this motion. Farmers do not want commercial trials; they do not want the product entering the supply chain. It was interesting to note that Trevor de Landgrafft did a little shift, but it was a shift to a more conservative stance, when he actually issued a formal statement. I do not know whether *The West Australian* got it right when it referred to up to 40 hectares, but the media release dated 30 August 2006 from the WA Farmers Federation said -

> WAFarmers current policy recognises these issues and calls for the establishment of farmers sized trials of up to 10 hectares in the Esperance district to provide a clear indication of the benefits or otherwise of GM Canola grown in WA conditions.

So that is the WA Farmers Federation's official word, with Trevor de Landgrafft listed as one of the media contacts, saying in a press release that farmers do not want to go any further than 10 hectares. That is entirely consistent with the approach taken by the government and it is entirely consistent with a trial of six to seven hectares in the Esperance region. Our position, therefore, is endorsed by the Western Australian Farmers Federation.

I want to briefly touch on some comments made by the two members of the opposition who contributed to the debate. I highlight again that the key point of difference between the motion and the government's position is the word "commercial". We do not want products from large-scale trials entering the supply chain because we cannot protect our no-GM status and there is no benefit in it. The member for Moore made a number of claims. He claimed last week that genetically modified canola grown in Canada gives yields that are 20, 30 or 40 per cent greater than those of conventional canola. The evidence does not support that claim. A report titled "Modelling Possible Impact of GM Crops on Australian Trade", which the Australian Productivity Commission

had published in October 2002, analysed GM canola grown in Canada. It reported a one per cent productivity increase and little evidence of any cost reduction. A one per cent productivity increase is probably not even statistically significant. Perhaps one could say that it produced an even yield. However, let me concede a one per cent increase. Why would someone take a one per cent yield increase for a 17 per cent price cut? It does not make sense.

Mr G. Snook interjected.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: If the member for Moore wants to have an argument, I suggest he take it up with the Productivity Commission, the source of that report. The Productivity Commission is concerned with Australian trade and Australian farmers. Canadian government sources are concerned with Canadian farmers and benefits to Canada. I am sure that the Canadians would love us to join them in the GM market, give up our price premium and put them on a level playing field. If that is the information that the member for Moore is relying on, he should take a good look at whose interests he is serving. Is he serving the interests of Canadian farmers or Australian farmers?

Prior to the operation of the act to which I referred earlier, some trials of GM varieties were conducted at Calingiri in Western Australia. Yields of triazine tolerant varieties and a GM product were compared. The trials confirmed that the GM product produced a lower yield than the non-GM hybrid. The Australian Productivity Commission, a highly reputable source, is claiming a one per cent productivity yield increase in Canada, and another trial showed a small reduction in yields in Western Australia. The argument about increased yield simply does not stack up. I suggest that the member for Moore is relying on information prepared by those whose interests are not the interests of Australian farmers, and he is running with it.

The member for Moore also said that 90 per cent of canola grown in Canada is genetically modified. He said that was by choice and that there was no compulsion. Of course there is no compulsion, but there is no benefit in having GM-free canola crops in Canada because the international markets do not recognise that GM-free status. The markets are not prepared to pay a premium for those who try to persist with non-GM crops when those crops are being grown alongside GM crops, because they know that contamination will have occurred and that the market advantage is lost. What is the point? Those farmers might as well grow GM canola if they are going to get the same price as everybody else. Frankly, the government and grower organisations in Canada have already given up the game. Why would anybody bother trying to grow non-GM crops in Canada?

To his credit, the member for Moore also acknowledged in his speech that there is a problem with cross-pollination causing GM contamination of non-GM crops. However, he went on to say -

> There is no real drama about the issue from the point of view of the farmer to whom I spoke.

Of course there is not, because that Canadian farmer was a GM canola grower. He would not be worried about contamination from non-GM crops at all because he had already lost his price premium. Why would he worry about contamination? I suggest that the member for Moore put at the forefront of his thoughts the interests of Western Australian farmers. To his credit, though, he almost got it right when he said that small trial crops can be run in controlled, virtually artificial situations. That is the point of having scientifically controlled experiments. A small-scale trial in which identical conditions can be produced, and GM and non-GM crops can be trialled alongside each other, will enable scientifically valid comparisons to be made.

Mr P.D. Omodei: What would happen if the size was increased 10 times? What about a commercial trial? You are away with the fairies.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: What size in hectares would the Leader of the Opposition define as being a commercial trial?

Mr P.D. Omodei: The bigger the better.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Presumably the whole wheatbelt?

Mr P.D. Omodei: We could use the whole of the great southern with no trouble. It would help anyway. You can keep your green credentials as long as you like.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: It has nothing to do with greenies and whether the resistance to GM products is real or not. It has nothing to do with whether it is based on real science or not. The reality is that Western Australian farmers get a premium price for non-GM crops, and the Leader of the Opposition has just said he wants to give it away and open up the whole wheatbelt. This is the truth of it, is it not? He wants to open it up, not to commercial trials, but open slather with corruption of the supply chain, a lost market and price advantage, and give it away. As a farmer and the leader of a major political party in Western Australia, he has let down his constituents badly.

I have touched on what Trevor de Landgrafft had to say in *The West Australian* last week, and the comments he subsequently made in a formal WA Farmers Federation press release. I must correct the member for Moore's misrepresentation of the position of the WA Farmers Federation. He said last week that Trevor de Landgrafft supported the concept of the Liberal policy, which is for trials of a commercial size. *The West Australian* reported Trevor de Landgrafft as supporting trials of up to 40 hectares but saying that commercial trials were not yet supported. The WA Farmers Federation then said that the formal position was support for a trial of 10 hectares, that it did not support commercial trials and that, in fact, it did not want to give away the farmers' commercial advantage until the market changes. Fortunately, I am here to correct and put on the public record exactly what Trevor de Landgrafft and the WA Farmers Federation said.

The member for Moore went on to say that farmers in Western Australia are crying out for change. I do not think they are. The government's policy is well supported. I have certainly seen no evidence that Western Australian farmers are crying out for this change. Some farmers might believe that they would have a commercial advantage. It would be interesting to see whether or not they are somehow connected to the product supply chain. There is certainly no groundswell of support for the change. I have said this before and I will say it again: farmers do not want to give up a $60-a-tonne price advantage, the 17 per cent price premium, and they do not want to lose market access in Europe.

The member for Moore also said that wheat is grown in GM canola paddocks in Canada, and that it is not a problem for wheat growers there; that they are our direct competitors and that they have no problem. They do have a problem. The Canadian wheat farmers must go to the additional expense of cleaning the grain to get rid of GM canola in order to sell the grain on the European market. Therefore, not only do the GM canola farmers lose out, but also Canadian wheat farmers lose.

The member for Roe had a few things to say. The basis of his argument was that all the argument about whether GM products are safe or not is scaremongering and the science does not bear out the view that it is not safe. History may prove him right, but the reality now is that there is market resistance to these products. He quoted Food Standards Australia New Zealand as saying that we should not resist GM products. It really does not matter what that organisation says; what matters is what consumers say and what they are prepared to pay for. Consumers in Australia, Europe and Asia have ongoing concerns about the safety of GM products. Why would we give up our non-GM status when there is no need to do so? We can do the science without having the contamination of the supply chain and, without an open slather approach as the Leader of the Opposition indicated he would like.

Mr P.D. Omodei: I didn't say that at all. Don't misrepresent me.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: The Leader of the Opposition said "the whole of the great southern". I am not misrepresenting him.

Mr P.D. Omodei: You said "open slather".

Mr M.P. WHITELY: The Leader of the Opposition said "the whole of the great southern". It is a fair leap from 10 hectares, I must say, and from what Western Australian farmers support. In fairness to the member for Roe, he argued about the science and whether these concerns should exist. That is a real issue, and it is why the Western Australian government has committed to trials. We have an open mind on this issue and will allow the matter to be proved. I want to put on the record that Food Standards Australia New Zealand does not do independent testing; it relies on written reviews. It is a real danger in scientific research, whether it is agriculture, food, drugs, waste management, or whatever issue I have been exposed to in my time in this Parliament, to rely on written reviews and not do independent testing. One has to bear down on who is doing the research and who is funding it.

In conclusion, I quote from the Liberal Party's policy document, which states -

> We are concerned that if Western Australian growers are denied access to GM technology that within a few years the canola industry will suffocate.

It is not suffocating now; it is getting a price premium. Why would we give away the 17 per cent extra we are receiving for the product? The policy document then goes on to say -

> We need to be part of this revolution.

The Liberal Party is basically preparing to take a high-stakes gamble by opening up the whole of the great southern for trials. We propose to allow small-scale trials, which will eliminate the risk.

Mr G. Snook: It is too big a risk.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: No, it is not. The risk is eliminated with one-kilometre buffers and by ensuring that no produce leaves the site, so that there is no contamination of the supply chain. We can eat our cake and have it too with our policy. Under our policy, farmers can enjoy the present situation, the high premiums and market access. They will be ready for whatever the future brings because there is the capacity for trials to be undertaken that can prove whether the yields warrant moving to GM canola. It saves us from giving away our market advantage and being locked into certain suppliers who control our market.

The key point in this issue is that members opposite have been lazy; they have not done their research. They have bought international research that pushes the barrow of overseas farmers to our disadvantage, whereas the Carpenter government and the Minister for Agriculture and Food in particular have at heart a concern for only one thing: protecting prices and market access. If products are proved, it will allow us to meet future changes in the market. For those reasons the government will oppose this motion.

MR P.D. OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood - Leader of the Opposition) [5.14 pm]: We now know why the Labor Party is out of touch with regional Western Australia. The parliamentary secretary obviously is not in contact with people in the department who know what is going on. Obviously the departmental officers who give him advice are obliged to bend to the policy of the government of the day. We have heard more today about the Labor Party's green policy and securing Green preferences than about advancing agriculture in Western Australia. That is what the government's stance is about. I challenge the parliamentary secretary to go to the Department of Agriculture and Food and talk to people in the biotechnology area about this very subject, because he is way off line. I then want him to go to all the universities and ask them about biotechnology in Western Australia. He should ask them what they think about genetically modified crops. Every single one of them will say that we are losing the race. He should also talk to the senior people in the Department of Agriculture and Food. They will tell him the same thing. If they are not telling him that, they are not telling the truth.

Let us look at today's figures for the canola crop size in Western Australia. In the 2003-04 season, 610 000 metric tonnes were produced; in 2004-05, 490 000 metric tonnes were produced; in 2005-06, 630 000 metric tonnes were produced; and this year our crop is expected to be 250 000 metric tonnes. The obvious reason for the decline is that we have a serious drought in Western Australia. Canada today produces 7.5 million metric tonnes and European production is 15 million metric tonnes. The European Union premium is currently $US30 a tonne, as the member said, which is approximately $40 a tonne. That gets a lot of publicity. The EU buyers are now finding out what the premium is, and it is slowly being driven lower. There are a whole lot of reasons for that.

Let us look at the latest moves in these matters. This information comes from the market in Japan -

> It is reported that on September 19th, the member countries of European Union will hold agricultural ministers meeting to decide to approve genetically modified canola seed Ms8xRf3 presented by Bayer Crop Science. The other variety GT73 presented by Monsanto has already approved to import to process by European Union although there remains the activation of detection method.
>
> In case of the approval of Ms8xRf3 by the working session by agricultural ministers group, it can be understood that Canadian GMO canola seeds have approved their commercialisation by European Union. If not, the final decision will be postponed to the . . . EU committee meeting

The further information I have is that in five days' time, on 19 September, the European Union member countries will meet to discuss lifting the current ban on the Bayer canola variety I just mentioned. If they do not lift the ban at this meeting, it is only a matter of time before they do. It is important to note that the European Union currently restricts the importation of GM canola. It is not the EU buyers who do not want GM canola. Biodiesel demand is growing rapidly and huge volumes are involved. The EU has to decide whether to allow GM canola or restrict the biodiesel demand. It is a huge decision to make. One must ask: realistically, which decision will be made? That is why it is only a matter of time. It is reported that when the ban is lifted, only five per cent of the Canadian crop will not be allowed into the EU. There goes the premium price, and Canada will have the foothold and the advantage in one of the fastest growing markets, and we will miss out.

Japan is one of our trading partners for canola and one of our major buyers. It pays a premium of $C10 to $C15 for WA canola, which is about $12 to $18 a metric tonne. It does not pay that premium because it is a GM crop but because it is good quality canola. The Japanese blend our canola with canola from other countries. Generally, all the buyers in the grain market want to buy from multiple countries so that they do not have to rely on one supplier and so they do not get screwed. The European Union is already accepting large volumes - more than 300 000 tonnes - of canola oil for biodiesel. It also allows GM canola oil to be imported, provided that it is crushed outside Europe. As I said, that is about to change. Western Australia produces only a very small

amount of canola. If we continue down the line that the member for Bassendean talks about, we will continue to be left behind in the canola stakes. We export canola to Japan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Europe. Some growers in Western Australia are concerned about GM canola, but that opinion is changing very quickly. If Western Australia is currently undergoing trials of 10 hectares, as the member for Bassendean said -

Mr M.P. Whitely: One is being worked up for approval by the minister.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: One of what?

Mr M.P. Whitely: Six or seven.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: That is about 160 acres.

Mr M.P. Whitely: No, it is not 67 hectares; it is six or seven hectares.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I thought the member said 67. That makes it worse. I would have thought that in an area the size of the wheatbelt, we could trial hundreds of hectares that could be isolated and that buffers could be established between the GM canola and the non-GM canola. The member is going to get a specially built biodiesel plant to crush six or seven hectares -

Mr M.P. Whitely: It will have one on-site.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: What an abject waste of taxpayers' money.

The benefits of growing GM canola or Roundup Ready canola in Western Australia include a reduction in the amount of chemicals that would be used, particularly triazine. If the government is concerned about the green aspects of this proposal, it should look at the amount of triazine that is used in Western Australia. TT is its common name. Atrazine has been banned in Europe for at least 25 years. It has a history of having contaminated estuaries, rivers and ground water, yet it continues to be used in Western Australia. The reason farmers do not talk about it too much is it is a good chemical and they want to keep using it. If they were allowed to use Roundup Ready canola seed, it could drastically reduce the amount of chemicals used in Western Australia. It would also save the farmers a lot of money, increase their yields and make us competitive on the international market.

My good friend the member for Roe talked about gene technology, how genes are formed and how they affect enzymes and protein. We have a system in Western Australia whereby we cross-breed and cross-pollinate plants, which produces reasonable results. There are huge time delays in the development of those systems. By the use of gene technology, a gene is implanted into a plant. Plants have about 20 000 genes in their make-up. A single gene can be either implanted or taken out. Plants can be made salt or drought tolerant and a number of other things that I will go into later. A system called mutagenesis is used in Western Australia whereby grass seeds and grain seeds are bombarded with radiation. The seeds are then planted, which sometimes produces a rare plant that is productive for the agricultural industry. The plants are bombarded by radiation, which is okay; that has been done for years. A lot of information on gene technology is available and a number of properties are being used to trial gene technology.

The member for Moore referred to some of the history of gene technology. In 1973 a gene was first removed from an organism by Stanley Cohen and Herbert Boyer. In 1982 biotechnology was used to develop human insulin for diabetics. My friend who was in the public gallery a while ago is a type-B diabetic. In 1990 an enzyme was first used in cheese making and was approved for use in the US. In 1994 new biotechnology enhancements were used in the production of tomatoes. In 1996 Australia's first commercial GM insect-resistant cotton and blue carnation entered the market. In 2001 herbicide-tolerant cotton production began in Australia. Also in 2001 the commonwealth government passed gene technology laws that remain current and laws were introduced for the mandatory labelling of GM foods. In 2003 two GM herbicide-tolerant canola varieties were approved for commercial planting in Australia.

Plants have about 22 000 genes and animals have approximately between 30 000 and 40 000 genes. I have talked about carnations and cotton. In 1996 a GM cotton variety known as INGARD cotton was produced. As the member for Roe said, it contains a natural insecticide to control a devastating cotton pest. It provides cotton with an in-built pest protection. Members will remember that when cotton was introduced into the Ord in the 1960s, it was sprayed with DDT and Dieldrin to stop insect infestation, and that has left chemical residues. There is no reason why we cannot grow Bt cotton in the Ord today, and trials have been conducted.

In 2003, 67.7 million hectares, which is an area equivalent to twice the size of the United Kingdom, was used to grow GM soybean, cotton, corn and canola. I am sure that the area used to grow GM products today is well and truly in excess of that figure. Those GM crops were grown in 18 countries by seven million farmers. The majority of the crops were grown in the United States, Argentina, Canada and China. Other countries that were growing GM crops include South Africa, Spain, Germany and Indonesia, and herbicide-tolerant soybean was the

most dominant GM crop grown across eight countries over 41.4 million hectares. This information is from a publication by Agrifood Awareness Australia titled "Gene Technology in Australia: Fact not Fiction". It refers to canola oil being used for cooking. Someone mentioned cotton seeds earlier. Most of our fish and chips are cooked in GM cotton seed oil. Canola oil is currently used to make margarines, other food products, salad dressings, mayonnaise, biscuits and cake mixes, and on it goes. Herbicide-tolerant, high-oleic GM soybeans are being grown and are used in soy beverages, tofu, soy oil, soy flour and lecithin. Soybean is also present in breads, pastries and snack foods. Herbicide-tolerant canola is used to cook fried foods, baked products and snack foods. The new characteristics of corn that has been genetically modified against insect protection include herbicide tolerance and insect protection. GM modified corn is used in oil, cornflour, sugar and syrup. Products containing GM corn may include snack foods, baked foods, fried foods, edible oil products, confectionary and soft drinks. Cotton seed and linters may be used in vegetable oils, fried foods, baked foods, snack foods and edible oil products. Even potatoes have been genetically modified to protect them against insects. The potential food uses for GM potatoes include either using the whole potato or making products that contain potato, such as snack foods, processed potato products and other processed foods. Sugar beet has also been genetically modified. The list goes on and on. The horse has bolted regarding GM crops in Western Australia; it has gone over the hill. If we do not hurry up and run after it, we will not catch it.

Mr M.P. Whitely: We will lose $60 on tonnage.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: We will lose $60 on what tonnage? What is the increase in the yield? The parliamentary secretary's figures differ from our figures. The only way we will find out whether this proposal is viable is to have a proper commercial trial, not one involving just six or seven hectares. The parliamentary secretary quotes selectively. He should talk to the farmers. He should go to Dowerin, Newdegate or the Bruce Rock show. He will get some supporters. I am not denying that some people still want to maintain that premium. After 19 September, how long does the parliamentary secretary think that premium will last? It will not last. The standards are protected under Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

I can go through a litany of people and organisations that have policies on genetically modified crops, including apple and pear growers, the Australian Food and Grocery Council, the Australian wine industry, the cotton industry, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the University of Queensland. I have a whole lot of references to key players in this document. I encourage members, particularly Labor members, of Parliament to look at it. I mentioned that dozens of countries are already involved. We will miss out on those lucrative markets if we keep going this way.

From a medical perspective - this was raised by the member for Moore - 53 products are produced by gene technology that assists the health of people around the world. Insulin is produced by a bacterium. Follicle stimulating hormones, tissue plasminogen activator analogues, human growth hormones, baby hamster cells, kidney cells, hamster ovary cells and Chinese hamster ovaries are genetically modified products. Some genetically modified products are used on very important things such as anti-CD20 lymphocyte antigen antibodies or recombinant hepatitis B surface antigen. All of these things are well documented. They assist people throughout our community and will continue to do so. Our science in gene technology is probably some of the best in the world. I implore the parliamentary secretary to talk to the biotechnology people at the universities in Western Australia. It is so important that we keep abreast of this technology.

Mr M.P. Whitely: Why don't you talk to the Farmers Federation?

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I talk to the Farmers Federation all the time. I also talk to the Pastoralists and Graziers Association, which also represents grain growers. It strongly supports our proposition to expand the trials for genetically modified crops. We have an act of Parliament with a sunset section in 2008. Is the parliamentary secretary trying to tell me that his government will continue that policy after 2008? On 19 September, in four or five days' time, the EU will allow genetically modified crops such as canola. Where will the premium be? It will go through the floor. The demand for canola oil and biodiesel is growing astronomically worldwide. The demand for fuel sourced by grains and some of the brassica type crops is problematic in the world. It will cause a shortage of food in the world in the near future. If we have some adverse climatic conditions in the Northern Hemisphere while there is a huge demand for biodiesel around the world today, people will choose to put some of their crops into those fuel markets.

It is a serious issue. It is one that this government should take seriously. We will offer the government bipartisan support. It should give us a commercial trial. I admit that I went over the top. I mentioned the whole of the great southern. If we had large areas of canola and some of it was GM and some was GM-free, that would create a problem. What would be the problem with using the whole Esperance port to export canola during a major trial? I thought 67 hectares was mentioned, not six or seven hectares. We should make it a 1 000 hectare

trial. We should make it a decent trial. We could give it a 10-kilometre buffer if that is what people want, but let us do something substantial today. What do we have to lose? Where will it go?

Mr M.P. Whitely: You will lose your price premium.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Rubbish. The price premium is going out the window as we speak. The EU is already taking 300 000 tonnes of canola oil from GM crops. I implore members of the Labor Party to talk to the farmers and the research organisations before they consign agriculture in WA to a further five or 10 years in a backwater.

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe) [5.35 pm]: As a farmer, I feel bound to speak on this motion. Having recently diversified from livestock into cropping -

Mr M.P. Whitely interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, my lands are growing. I congratulate the member for Moore, the Leader of the Opposition and others for speaking on this motion and bringing it forward.

Mr R.C. Kucera: Given your view on growing things, I'm wondering what you're growing.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Paterson's curse at the moment!

Mr M. McGowan: How big is your farm?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is modest.

Mr M.P. Whitely: Suitable for a trial?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It would want to be a bit bigger for the trial the parliamentary secretary is proposing, but it is not big enough. This is a serious issue for agriculture. All I want to add to this debate is that back in 1970, the monetary values of our agriculture and mining industries were about the same. Both of them have grown, but now the mining and petroleum industry is many times bigger than agriculture. That primarily reflects the growth of the mining and petroleum industries. I cannot help thinking that agriculture has not developed in this state to the extent that it could have. The world is moving on. The explanation of the science of genetically modified products by the member for Roe was very, very good. There is nothing to fear. I endorse an approach, which has been in place and will continue, of proceeding cautiously but we must proceed. We cannot simply stand still. Commercially large-scale trials that we can learn something from, that will improve the crop and that are safe are the way to go.

From listening to some of the speakers earlier, it clear that this is one of those conundrum-type issues. It is a bit like the environmentalists and green-thinking people of this world who have always rallied against uranium and nuclear power. The thinkers now realise that perhaps that is wrong, perhaps nuclear power is the solution. This is the same. To the many people who have rallied against the use of pesticides and herbicides in agricultural areas, I say that perhaps the solution is genetically modified crops. The science will advance. No matter what we do in Western Australia, the science, productivity and protection of those crops will advance. I feel a lot more comfortable as a consumer knowing that products are grown with less use of pesticides and herbicides. We all care about the environment these days. That has to be better for the protection of Western Australia's land, water resources and the like. Let science play its role. The Labor Party is taking a very narrow and limited view. The caution that has been shown to this point has probably been justified and prudent, but now is the time to take a modest but significant step forward.

I congratulate the rural members. We all work together in the farming industries in this state. It is a good issue and it is an issue that the Labor Party thinks about. As Liberal members have said to government members, go and talk to the scientists in the Department of Agriculture and Food. They should talk to the larger farmers who are abreast of modern developments and have sophisticated, larger commercial operations. If we maintain a policy that this will somehow damage the clean, green image of Western Australia, the farming industry could decline significantly in the future with the threat of reduced rainfall, salinity and all the rest of it. If we deny our agricultural industry the ability to use the world's best science, we will hold it back. I do not think we should do that. We should be allowing it to move ahead responsibly. This is a modest proposal to simply allow commercially sized trials to move a step forward. I endorse it very strongly.

MR M.W. TRENORDEN (Avon) [5.39 pm]: I spent last week in Penang. I went there with a representative from a producer called Driscoll Produce in the Avon Valley. He is heavily involved in exporting hay, oats and particularly chaff. He is the single biggest Western Australian exporter to Asia and to significant slices of Penang, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines and Macau. The important point is that he is selling those products to Penang for its horse industry; that is, both racehorses and equestrian horses. Many of those horses are Western Australian, Minister for Racing and Gaming. The main horse race in Penang was won that week by a Western Australian horse. Of the 10 races on the main day, four were won by Western Australian horses.

Mr T.R. Sprigg: Did you back one?

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: There were 38 races and I backed one winner! That is probably why I made the comments that I did about Betfair, because I am more about losers than winners! Nevertheless, the point is that there is a significant industry in Penang. One of Western Australia's producers, which pulls in hundreds of other producers, is exporting a quality product to Asia, and we are benefiting from that.

Some time ago the Labor Party changed the name of the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Agriculture and Food. I thought that changing the name of the department to include a reference to food would have been a signal. The fact is that if our farmers grow bulk wheat, canola, oats and barley, they will go broke. There is no longer a margin for those products. The future predictions for grain prices are pretty dismal. The price that grain growers will get this year is very similar to the price they got 10 or 15 years ago. The only reason they have been able to stay in the market is their productivity. In recent times the agriculture department has been gutted. There is very little left of the original department; it is probably about a quarter the size it was six years ago. We have argued about instituting a breeding program, which I cannot see happening any time soon. I will be keen to meet a few people in coming months and find out whether the breeding program will be undertaken. We cannot keep increasing productivity to keep farmers viable. We must look at the world trends in food, and not just agriculture, and recognise where the money lies. The real money in the Western Australian agricultural industry is in sheep meat. The future for sheep meat is quite bright. Then we look at beef, and then we step down the ladder until we get to bulk commodities such as canola and wheat. Unless we can do something about the price of those products, the outlook for farming is not very bright. We can get a small benefit from oats, for example. Our oats are sought by millers because of their very high quality. In fact, a miller in Penang described the oats grown between York and Boyup Brook as the world's best oats. If we have high-quality oats, we can get a premium. If we grow barley for the brewing market, we can get a premium. However, we need to get a premium from canola and wheat. Unless we can come up with ways to ensure that we can get a premium, unfortunately, our farmers will be in strife.

I have a very busy office and a lot of my time is spent talking to farmers who are looking for alternative ways to use the land to make money. They are not looking for more land to plant wheat or canola. They are looking for different ways to make money because the world market is forcing them to do so. The professionals are saying that clean and green is definitely the way to go, but not in the context of clean, green canola. Clean and green means that a product is healthy. People want to know that the meat and vegetables they are sourcing are not contaminated. My shots at Coles and the like have caused enormous activity in my electorate. The feeling of members of the public about what they eat and where the products are sourced from is substantial. It is not only Western Australians who feel that way; even the poorest people in the world feel that way. They will access low-quality foods if that is all they can afford to purchase. However, as they move forward and make decisions about feeding their families higher-quality and safer products, they will source those products. The argument about isolating canola crops is misplaced. I cannot totally disagree with the biggest farmer in the chamber - the member for Cottesloe. However, I know of no penalty for taking the stance that we have taken to this point, but some time soon we will have to break those shackles. We will have to read the tea-leaves and decide where we will go.

I read the newspapers while I was in Penang and I know that Malaysia is clearly impressed with Brazil. Why are the Malaysians impressed with Brazil? They are impressed because Brazil is the world authority on, and holds the intellectual capital for, ethanol production. Malaysia has indicated that it will do that with biodiesel; it will be the world authority on biodiesel. Its biodiesel will come from palm oil.

Mr R.C. Kucera: They are raping what is left of their countryside.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: The member for Yokine should go to Burma. He might be able to make that argument about Indonesia, but Borneo is a different matter.

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: No, at the bottom end of Borneo.

Mr R.C. Kucera: I flew over Borneo last year, and what they have done is amazing. They have stripped the top of the hillsides.

Mr M. McGowan: At the top of Borneo is Brunei.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Brunei is a tiny bit in the corner. Sarawak and Sabah are two Malaysian states.

Several members interjected.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I make the point, member for Yokine, that there are very few roads in Borneo. It is pretty much untouched compared with other nations.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs J. Hughes): Can members cease with the geography lesson and allow the member for Avon to be heard.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Let us not argue about the environmental aspects. Malaysia is producing palm oil on both the mainland and the island of Borneo and it is turning that palm oil into biodiesel. Palm oil is used significantly in perfumes and cooking oil. It is a major product for Malaysia, but Malaysia is looking for a competitive advantage in biodiesel, and it is clever to do that. If we want a competitive advantage in biodiesel in Western Australia, we will have to look at some sort of hybrid. The people I have spoken to say that it will be the mustard seed. It might be canola, but members in the chamber will know that canola and mustard are very closely aligned. They are cousins. However, we will have to develop something from which we can produce biodiesel very cheaply. Although mustard is very bitter and unfit for human consumption, it has the advantage of a high oil content that can be turned into biodiesel.

Mr B.J. Grylls: It can grow in a more arid environment.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Yes, it will grow and yield strongly. In that process we must think about how we can get there, and GM crops will be a part of that process.

It annoys me that some people, not farmers, come to my electorate office and tell me that we should not have GM food but they pop GM medicine every day. They have no problem with popping pills that are basically 100 per cent GM products.

Mr M.P. Whitely: That is what the markets state, rightly or wrongly.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: That is right. However, I am saying to the member for Bassendean that there will be a time when the handbrake will have to come off. If we must call the former Department of Agriculture the Department of Agriculture and Food, we must think about the process to make producers, particularly the fruit growers in the south west, realise that very soon they will have to make some very hard decisions.

Dr S.C. Thomas: They are already making them; half of them have pulled out.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Exactly. These are very significant issues. This debate is not just about GM and canola; it is also about a range of new processes that we must think about. I will support the motion because I believe we need to think about the future. This is not just about farmers making money; it is also about all Western Australian having access to quality food and such products that give them security about the GM process. It does not mean that they will eat GM food for many years to come. If we listen to the scientists about contamination, apart from some arguments in Canada there are not many arguments about cross-contamination in most varieties. This is not a brand-new activity any more; it has been around for many years. It is time to take the handbrake off. It is time to start looking at new horizons for agriculture.

MR B.J. GRYLLS (Merredin - Leader of the National Party) [5.42 pm]: I am also very happy to inform the Parliament that there were very good rains across the seat of Merredin this year. Many farmers there are looking forward to what may turn out to be an average year. They are not yelling it too loudly, although I am happy to. The northern region around Northampton may not get an average year, but it could turn out to be okay around the southern part of the wheatbelt, which is very important for going forward.

Imagine that this side of the Parliament was opposing the biotechnology being developed by our Nobel prize winners in Western Australia. At the moment the Labor government is very much behind the development of a biotech industry in Western Australia. It is very excited about our Nobel prize winners and our other excellent researchers and scientists who are coming up with world-renowned discoveries and new technologies. I welcome them with open arms. I very much agree that Western Australia should focus on biotechnology and give as much support as it can to that side of the market. I therefore find it quite difficult to understand why the same government says that it will not use that biotechnology in agriculture because it believes there is a market that will pay a premium for not having it and so the government will stop that technology going forward. That is where we are at the moment. I admit that we could find a few markets that will pay a premium for some of our products, but those few markets do not underpin agriculture in Western Australia. They are niche premium markets, and we do not know for how long they will last or what they will turn into. However, I do know that if we do not keep up with, but instead fall behind, technological advances across the board in every sector, not just agriculture, we will stay behind and other countries will get ahead and it will be very difficult to catch up. That is where I think this debate is heading. National Party members supported the moratorium on GM products to enable them to talk to their constituents and the wider community, but time has gone on and they believe now is the time to remove the moratorium and allow those same scientists in Western Australia, who have produced Nobel prize winners, to focus just as much on agriculture as they have focused on medicine and other fields. Currently we appear to have a two-tier system; we are embracing biotechnology in the field of medicine but hindering biotechnology in the field of agriculture. That cannot be a positive move for going forward.

The member for Avon spoke about the opportunity for a biofuels industry with not only canola and mustard technology, but also straw and other technologies. Consideration is being given to a series of ways of making energy out of raw agricultural produce. I for one would like every single tonne of grain produced in Western Australia turned into an energy alternative rather than a food alternative. The food market is currently under pressure. I have also met the farmers that the member for Avon talked about in his speech. The ability to return a strong profit from growing agricultural products for food and feed is quite difficult and has been for a while now. It is only through efficiency, productivity gains and land value increases that farmers have managed to stay ahead of the game. However, if they could head higher and divert their production into the world energy market, which is a very volatile market, that would be a positive outcome not only for individual farm businesses but also for the whole state economy. I am sure that every member of this chamber would agree that farmers should focus their attention on selling their products into the best paying and highest demand markets, which are not currently to be found in food markets. Members who suggest that farmers should be compelled to grow food when the market does not want to pay for it should examine every other policy that the government asks them to support. Farmers will consider doing that when other sectors are similarly compelled.

I am extremely concerned that Western Australia's Nobel prize winners are being instructed to focus only on medical technology. Their discoveries with new technologies are very exciting for the state. Western Australia is beginning to develop a name for having some of the world leaders in biotechnology, while at the same time it is forcing out other scientists who are focused on agriculture. Every member of this Parliament should take the opportunity to visit Murdoch University, where some of these trials on gene technology are taking place. The trials are very open; there is nothing secretive about them. It is very exciting for saline-affected landowners and the wider community to see wheat plants growing in one-third sea water in an effort to look after the land. Some of the work being done to extract oil from plants is also very exciting. However, no company and no scientist will invest time, effort and money to discover a seed or plant if they know it cannot be released into the wider commercial market. It just defies logic that they would invest time and money in a market that is not allowed to exist. That is exactly where we are now. There is no point in companies or scientists trying to find a salt-tolerant or frost-tolerant wheat, a high-oil-content seed or any other plant species when they are being told that the product cannot be commercially released in Western Australia if GM technology is used in developing it. Unfortunately, not a heap of money can be made out of greenhouse trials of those different products. At the moment those companies are going to agricultural markets where that technology can be used; that is where research in technology is being developed. They are looking at particular types of grains and crops and focusing their research on those strains. For that reason we cannot deny that Western Australia is being left behind.

Mr M.P. Whitely: Do you understand what this debate is about?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: It is about a broad-scale GM canola trial.

Mr M.P. Whitely: Do you understand the Western Australian Farmers Federation's position on this? What do you think about it?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Do I understand the Western Australian Farmers Federation's position? I am explaining my position.

Mr M.P. Whitely: I am wondering whether you understand it. You are the Leader of the National Party.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I understand that some WA farmers support GM and some do not support it.

Mr M.P. Whitely: What about the official position of WAFarmers?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: The member for Bassendean can read it to me.

Mr M.P. Whitely: Do I have to?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Yes; he should read it to me.

Mr M.P. Whitely: All right. It states -

> WAFarmers supports continued well contained trialled research into GMOs including (subject to the adequate resolution of legal liability issues to protect existing industries) the establishment of farmers sized trials of up to 10 hectares of GM Canola in the Esperance district to provide a clear indication of the benefits or otherwise of GM Canola grown in WA conditions.
>
> . . .
>
> WAFarmers supports the lifting of the current State Government moratorium on the commercial release of GMOs when markets clearly indicate their preparedness to accept GM produce.

What do you think about that?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I welcome WAFarmers into the debate. I do not always agree with WAFarmers, but on many issues I do agree with it.

Mr M.P. Whitely: Is that the first time you have heard that?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: No; I think I have heard that before. People I talk to change their positions regularly. Does the member for Bassendean share the same view as every member of his party on absolutely everything?

Mr M.P. Whitely: I did not think I would be educating the Leader of the National Party on the WAFarmers' position. I thought he would at least understand its position.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I knew that its position on genetically modified organisms was less aggressive than my position, and the member for Bassendean has just confirmed that.

Mr M.P. Whitely: What size trials would you support?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I would support the commercial trial we are debating now.

Mr M.P. Whitely: How big is that? The member for Moore could not define it. The Leader of the Opposition said that a trial should be held in the great southern region. What do you think?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: We should create a biosphere around Esperance, because Esperance is separate from the rest of the agricultural region. If we allow full-scale genetically modified cropping in the Esperance region - from talking to farmers down there I am sure they would support it - the rest of the state could get a clear indication of the potential of GMO farming on a full-sized commercial scale. The problem of separation could be studied, as could how CBH Ltd could store the crop. Then we could debate what actually happened rather than what might happen, as we are doing now.

Mr T.K. Waldron: We can't have that; that would be commonsense!

Mr M.P. Whitely: Doesn't WAFarmers exhibit any commonsense on this issue?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: WAFarmers has a position to which it is most welcome. I attended WAFarmers' conference earlier this year and I called not just for a commercial trial but for the whole moratorium to be dropped on non-food GM crops in Esperance and wider afield.

Mr G. Snook interjected.

Mr M.P. Whitely: The Leader of the National Party could answer the question and you couldn't. Last week you ran away like a scared little boy. You didn't understand what you were talking about. You couldn't define a commercial trial; you had no idea.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I have no problem with the Labor Party having a position that supports the moratorium. It has a party position and it has stuck to it. This motion indicates that the opposition does not agree with that position and we will make that case. The government will consult the lobby groups and will continue to consider the matter.

Mr M.P. Whitely interjected.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: It is much wider than that, because I am keen for GM cotton crops to be grown in the Ord. The expansion of the Ord River region provides a very exciting opportunity for those in the north west of Western Australia. I find quite sad the unemployment problems among our indigenous community in the north when there are many opportunities for employment in agriculture in the Ord. The Ord stage 2 is a very important project, but a crop is needed to underpin that expansion. The support of the big companies is required for that to happen. From my travels to that area, I have formed the view that GM cotton crops could allow that to happen. Once again, because of the state moratorium on GMOs, expansion of the Ord remains in the balance. I keep reiterating the fact that this government is happy to champion the biotech industry in medicine but will not do the same for biotech in agriculture, despite widespread evidence of the need for it. I will not accept as the only argument to maintain the moratorium that we can sell a few tonnes of canola in Europe at a premium. The government must come up with stronger arguments than that. The parliamentary secretary said, I think, that just 10 per cent of canola exported from Western Australia is sold into that market. We are not talking about enough to rule out GM cotton in the north, expansion of the oil seed industry into biofuels and the other gains that can be made with future frost-tolerant and salt-tolerant crops. The member for Bassendean will always be able to find a lobby group or individuals who are opposed to GM and I will always be able to find someone on the other side who supports GM crops. At the end of the day, this Parliament's role is to debate issues that will impact on us, not just today but for up to 20 years. Agriculture is dear to my heart, and I would specifically like GM crops to be identified as a positive proposition for Western Australia so that our very good scientists can get on with the job of breeding new crops. The agricultural industry should be congratulated, because its productivity gains over the past 10 years have been better than those of any other sector. That is the only way it has managed to keep its

head above water. I find no joy in continually talking about agriculture needing to adapt and grow. I would like the agricultural industry to enjoy the great boom that the mining industry is in the middle of.

On an unrelated matter, the managed investment scheme argument at the moment is very important to agriculture. I am extremely concerned once again that WAFarmers and the National Farmers' Federation are opposing the managed investment scheme industry. The effect of farm lobby groups deliberately trying to drive down the price of agricultural land might be all right for people trying to buy farms. However, if the price of land is forced down, farm owners who are using the farm as equity for bank loans could find the banks knocking on their doors and asking how they plan to meet their future debts. That is the argument being made at the moment. The timber industry has added a great deal to the economy of the south west corner of WA, although I acknowledge that it has experienced some changes. Agriculture has been going through changes for many years. The remarks by the shire president of Esperance, which has particularly benefited from the tree industry, that he wishes the tree industry had not developed, indicate that he does not recognise the employment and growth opportunities that that industry has created in the Esperance region. Massive downstream processing is occurring in Albany and surrounding districts.

Mr M. McGowan: Why did he say that?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I do not understand why. I know the shire president of Esperance well. I think it was due to the displacement of traditional farming. That raises the issue of whether traditional farming will continue in the next 30 years or whether we will have to embrace technologies such as GMO and managed investment schemes with corporate investment in agriculture. Some farmers oppose it strongly and some embrace it. At the end of the day, the value of agricultural land is most critical to everything we talk about in agriculture. It underpins absolutely everything. If there is downward pressure on agricultural land prices, we will be in big trouble. At the moment, the agricultural industry throughout the state is enjoying very strong land prices, and that will allow farmers to exit the industry if they see fit. That allows them the option of retiring or entering into another business. If land prices decrease, that option will not be available to many of them and we will be in trouble. I draw a comparison between getting rid of the managed investment schemes in agriculture and taking negative gearing out of the housing market, which would cause a meltdown in the wider community.

This debate is really interesting. As I said, I welcome the fact that the GMO issue keeps coming back to the Western Australian Parliament. It needs to be continually raised. The Nationals are very happy to continue debating the issue. At the moment, because of the numbers in this chamber, we keep losing that debate. However, members of the Liberal and National Parties need to continue to put their views forward on where this issue is going. We accept other points of view. All members in this chamber are elected to be leaders. All members in this chamber are elected to look at where the future lies for Western Australia. To say that the future of agriculture should not involve GMOs is short-sighted. We do not do it in medicine or biotechnology. Perhaps that is why Western Australia has two Nobel prize winners for medical biotechnology but no Nobel prize winners for agriculture.

DR S.C. THOMAS (Capel) [6.10 pm]: I have always considered myself to be a genetically modified organism sceptic. I am a sceptic of the GMO industry.

Dr G.G. Jacobs: Are you going to support this motion or not?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The member for Roe should get back in his box for a minute.

Dr G.G. Jacobs: I just want to know your position.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I have always been a sceptic of the GMO industry. Members may recall the Gene Technology Bill that we debated last year. That was one of the first bills that I dealt with as a member of this state Parliament. That legislation was effectively uniform legislation from the commonwealth. The bill dealt with the restrictions that should be placed on genetically modified organisms and the licences that would be required. The Leader of the National Party will recall that debate. The current Leader of the Opposition and I have done some work on gene technology. Unlike many members of the government, I have a reasonable understanding of the processes involved. We put forward a proposal that would restrict the ability of genetically modified organisms to contaminate nearby crops. If the government was concerned about contamination by genetically modified organisms it would have given that proposal some consideration and said, "Hang on a minute. This is actually a good thing for Western Australia." However, that is not what the government did. The government worked very hard to defeat that proposal. The government was not interested in minimising the risk of contamination by genetically modified organisms, because it was concerned that that would limit the introduction of genetically modified organisms at some time in the future. That position was also taken by the National Party at the time. The debate at that time was very robust. The Liberal Party was the only party that

looked in a scientific manner at what might result from contamination by genetically modified organisms. That was a forerunner of the new coalition; we saw it in action.

The government is being very hypocritical in this debate. A year ago the government was not at all worried about contamination by genetically modified organisms. Now, one year later, the government is trying to play politics with the issue of GMOs by saying it will try to ensure that the moratorium is enforced, with the exception of scientific experiments. The parliamentary secretary has spent some time tonight talking about what is an appropriate size for a commercial trial. That issue should be addressed. However, I am not sure that it has been addressed adequately to this point. As I have said, I am a sceptic of the GMO industry. I am not a sceptic of the science of genetically modified organisms. I am not a sceptic of the science of quarantine. I am not a sceptic of the science of being able to meld the two together. The parliamentary secretary can probably tell us why a one-kilometre buffer is being used for the trials that are taking place at the moment. I am sure members of the government would be aware that the possible spread of the brassica species seed generally works out at 800 metres, given about a 98 per cent accuracy zone. The Leader of the House is nodding his head. I am sure that was on the tip of his tongue!

Mr J.C. Kobelke: You just beat me to it!

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The Leader of the House was about to come out with that very important piece of information! Of course everyone knows that is why there is a one-kilometre buffer zone for genetically modified canola trials. The answer to the question, parliamentary secretary, about what size would be appropriate is what size would be scientifically appropriate. I say again that I am a sceptic of the GMO industry. However, we will not know the answer to what will happen until the government sets up a trial. We will not know the answer to what will happen until the parliamentary secretary can tell me where the trial will take place, what parameters will be placed around it, what the prevailing winds and waters will be, and how many acres will surround it. It might be a patch of 100 acres, 1 000 acres or 10 0000 acres that can be scientifically controlled and quarantined. The question about how big the trial should be should be limited not by the perception of the government, the National Party or the Liberal Party, but by what the parameters should be and how the quarantine situation can be met. The size of the trial does not matter. We can put an arbitrary size on it. If we put aside 10 000 acres for a commercial trial, and if we can control the quarantine variables, which is a minimum of an 800-metre buffer around the outside -

Mr M.P. Whitely interjected.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I will get to that in a minute. A commercial trial does not necessarily mean there will be contamination from one harvest into the next. Let us get back to basics. My understanding is that the government has already signed off on acceptable contamination levels. Is that correct, parliamentary secretary? Has the government already signed off on acceptable contamination levels?

Ms J.A. Radisich: That is an excellent question! We are really glad you have raised it. We look forward to your comments.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The minister has signed off on it already at the ministerial committee. The government has already signed off on acceptable contamination levels. Member for Swan Hills, was the minister wrong to sign off on acceptable contamination levels?

Ms J.A. Radisich: The philosophical questions that you pose -

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Was the minister wrong to sign off on that? The Leader of the House will tell us! It will be on the tip of his tongue again! Was the Minister for Agriculture and Food wrong to sign off on a tolerance level for genetically modified organisms?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: You are a veterinarian. I will leave you to be the expert in this area.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: We have had a day of non answers, and it is continuing beautifully!

Mr G. Snook: You can tell him what it is, can you not? You know.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: It does not matter. Whether it is 0.9 per cent or 0.5 percent is immaterial. The question is not whether the minister has signed off on acceptable contamination levels; it is whether the minister has the right to do so. If the parliamentary secretary says any contamination is a problem, why would the minister sign off on 0.9 per cent or 0.5 per cent for seed stock? The answer is, of course, that the government has already signed off on a tolerance level.

Mr G. Snook: That is the national one.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: It was federally imposed, but the state government signed off on it. It has already accepted it.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Is there any area of science that does not have tolerance levels?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: There are some areas of science that do not have tolerance levels. There are others that are absolute. The problem is the minister has accepted it on the one hand, but on the other hand the government is now using it as an argument to defeat what is a very good motion by the member for Moore. It is hypocritical for the government to use that argument, as is to some degree this entire debate -

Mr M.P. Whitely: This state has a reputation as a no-GM state.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Yes, we have.

Mr M.P. Whitely: We are not saying it is GM-free. There is a distinction, as I think the member would understand. Some of the member's colleagues might not understand, but the member is a bit brighter than most of them.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: We have been getting some compliments today! We are doing very well!

Mr T.K. Waldron interjected.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The National Party takes exception to the compliment, but that is okay! A tolerance level has already been accepted by the government. There is no reason that a scientific evaluation of a commercial trial should be prevented. The size of the commercial trial should be based on environmental and quarantine parameters of whatever area is put forward. As other speakers have said, the area of the state towards Esperance can provide areas of significant size that can be isolated, quarantined and tested under significantly different conditions.

I turn to the supply chain. The government has already accepted in its Gene Technology Bill that genetically modified organisms can be grown under certain circumstances. The government has already spoken of putting a trial together. It is not the fact that contamination is necessarily absolute, because the minister has spoken of a trial of genetically modified canola.

Mr M.P. Whitely: The product would stay on the site and the processing for biodiesel production would remain on the site, so there is no risk of supply chain contamination.

Mr G. Snook: Nor would there be with the commercial trial that we are advocating. What is the problem? The only difference would be that there would be real volume, whereas with your trial there would be no real volume.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I will get a word in edgeways eventually, Madam Deputy Speaker. The government has conducted trials of genetically modified and salt-tolerant wheats. They already exist and have been endorsed by the current government. What is the difference, and why have government members got this hypocritical view of the motion of the member for Moore? They are saying that GM canola cannot be controlled in the supply chain. Genetically modified canola could be dealt with in a hundred different ways, if government members do not trust the quarantine processes that might be put in place, which I suspect is the real reason. I have great trouble trusting the quarantine and biosecurity credentials of the government, because I think they are in tatters. If I were to oppose this motion, I would do so only on the ground that the government is probably incompetent and unable to put in place adequate quarantine measures.

I support the motion on the ground that I hope at some stage this government will be removed and a more competent and adequate government will come into play. That means the seating arrangements on the two sides of the chamber will be reversed. At that point there might be some reasonable biosecurity measures in place, we might get some reasonable quarantine in place and the proposal might have some real legs. If the government opposes the motion on the ground that it is incapable of providing adequate quarantine measures and maintaining a proper scientific trial, I would probably accept that. I would look at the government's record on cane toads, starlings, arum lilies, blackberries and just about everything else.

Dr G.G. Jacobs: What lilies?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Death lilies, arum lilies or funeral lilies; the member may take his pick.

Mr J.E. McGrath: They are your favourite flower.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: They are a lovely flower.

Dr G.G. Jacobs: Are they the flowers you gave to the Minister for the Environment for his birthday?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Those are the ones we sent. He was very grateful.

I can understand the government opposing this motion, based on its own record over time, which has been appalling, but that is not enough for me to oppose the motion. A couple of things can happen. The government could get its act together. Members should not laugh when I say that. The government then might have some serious and proper quarantine protocols and be able to control the supply chain of the products. That should not be too difficult to do. That is one possibility. The other possibility is that in a couple of years the government might change and there might then be some competence brought to bear. A couple of opportunities are available.

Let us talk about a couple of advantages of genetically modified organisms. I am sceptical about the industry. To be honest with the parliamentary secretary, I would like to give it the opportunity to fail. If genetically modified canola is commercially trialled, and it is proved that over time GM-free canola would make our farmers better off, I think that would be great. It would be brilliant if our farmers got a $100-a-tonne commercial advantage for growing GM-free canola. To be realistic, it would probably be only $50. I believe that contamination could be controlled for the time it would take. I am willing to accept that this would not happen for a couple of years until the government changed, so we have some time in which to prove it. I would not mind if a controlled trial failed, but a scientific examination to find out whether it would fail is absolutely essential. As is evident from so many experiments of the government, the government is out of control, but we will not go there. There are positives as well as risks with genetically modified organisms. Some of them might not only be good for industry, but also produce very good environmental outcomes.

We might talk about salinity, which is something very dear to the Minister for Water Resources. I know he has been out there in the trenches and the channels.

Dr G.G. Jacobs: And in the infill sewerage.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: We will not talk about infill sewerage at the moment. It is one of those experiments of the Labor Party that have failed. It has the stench of corruption, but we will not go there either.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The member made a comment about the Parliamentary Liberal Party and corruption, which was uncalled for. I was enjoying his speech until then.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I was not referring to the Parliamentary Liberal Party, even though the member said I was! However, I am happy to withdraw, notwithstanding that it was not found to be a point of order.

The environmental impact of salt-tolerant plants lowering the salt table to a point at which other plants might be able to be regrown might have a very positive outcome for much of the state of Western Australia. I would love there to be alternatives. The Liberal Party is looking at alternatives that we can use to reclaim much of that land. We are looking at many ways in which we can produce positive environmental benefits. It might be that genetically modified organisms are needed as part of the answer. I would hate to think that we spent the rest of our time with our heads in the sand because of a flawed ideology if we were capable of maintaining adequate scientific controls. That is the issue I want to put forward. If the government were competent, the system would work.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That is asking a bit much.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I know it is a big ask. The motion deserves to be supported, but I know full well that the end result it desires will not happen until that level of competence is achieved. I suspect that will not happen until we reverse the seating situation in this house.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Ayes (20)

Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr R.F. Johnson	Dr S.C. Thomas
Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr M.W. Trenorden
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Dr K.D. Hames	Mr P.D. Omodei	Mr T.K. Waldron
Dr E. Constable	Ms K. Hodson-Thomas	Mr A.J. Simpson	Ms S.E. Walker
Mr M.J. Cowper	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr G. Snook	Mr T.R. Sprigg *(Teller)*

Noes (24)

Mr A.J. Carpenter	Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan	Mrs C.A. Martin	Mrs M.H. Roberts
Mrs J. Hughes	Mr J.A. McGinty	Mr M.P. Murray	Mr T.G. Stephens
Mr J.N. Hyde	Mr M. McGowan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr J.C. Kobelke	Ms S.M. McHale	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr P.B. Watson
Mr R.C. Kucera	Mr A.D. McRae	Ms J.A. Radisich	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr F.M. Logan	Mr N.R. Marlborough	Mr E.S. Ripper	Mr S.R. Hill *(Teller)*

Pairs

Mr G.A. Woodhams	Mr J.J.M. Bowler
Mr M.J. Birney	Mr P.W. Andrews
Mr T.R. Buswell	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.T. Redman	Dr J.M. Edwards

Independent Pair

Dr J.M. Woollard

Question thus negatived.