

## GENETICALLY MODIFIED CANOLA

### *Statement*

**The PRESIDENT:** I will give the call for members' statements to Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm and Hon Linda Savage, as they have stood for the past two evenings; then Hon Helen Morton, Hon Giz Watson and Hon Robin Chapple.

**HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural)** [5.24 pm]: I rise to make a brief statement about the recent debate on genetically modified canola, particularly given the volume of emails and correspondence received at my electorate office. I did not have an opportunity in the past two days to do so, and I therefore now want to put on record a few observations.

I say, though, at the outset that I have no objection whatsoever to producers of most goods and services, particularly farmers, exercising their legitimate right to supply to markets. As an example, members would know that I, along with my partners, produce wine.

**Hon Max Trenorden:** You don't produce it to us, though! You should produce it to us!

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** The fact of the matter is that if the wine is no good, Hon Max Trenorden would not drink it; nobody would drink it, and until I changed my method of production, I would go broke. I suppose the only other alternative would be to drink it all, but not even I could do that!

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** I have seen you in action!

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** It is certainly not a very forgiving industry. I can assure Hon Simon O'Brien that there is no truer saying than the one that says, "If you want to make \$1 million out of viticulture, you should start with \$10 million." It is not a particularly forgiving industry. But at the end of the day, markets do decide it, and I agree with that. I am a firm believer.

Either way, no matter which way we look at it, in our mixed economy in society today, consumers demand and producers supply. As an example of that, nobody would demand a black and white television in this day and age, so they are not produced. Consumers increasingly demand low-fat, low-salt products in their diet—"most", I say to Hon Ken Travers!—so producers supply these sorts of commodities. Hon Ken Travers looked somewhat askance at me, Mr President, so I had to make some sort of comment.

**Hon Ken Travers:** I thought you were talking about low-fat, low-salt wines!

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** No. It is the salt and fat that Hon Ken Travers has with the wines that do the damage!

**Hon Ken Travers:** When I drink your wines, I assume they are low fat and low salt!

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** Can I continue, Mr President?

Some economic pursuits are not necessarily plain sailing. That, I hasten to add, means that an interventionist role is played by governments in this day and age. To cite examples, I am sure members would understand that we have laws for asbestos, and lead in petrol and paint. We have DDT—dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane—issues and, of course, CFCs—chlorofluorocarbons—are no longer allowed in the materials we use in our homes. Nobody would argue with the need for those laws because they are designed simply to protect the health and welfare of citizens of a particular country. It is in that direction that I now want to head.

The Minister for Child Protection, representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food, made what I consider to be a rather disturbing remark earlier in the week when she said in relation to GM canola that the horse has bolted. She indicated that the checks were in place, the research had been done and the trials had been completed successfully; I believe the intimation was that it was now open slather. I suggest to members that the Australian experience over many years reveals a biosecurity and biodiversity legacy of which we should all be ashamed. We have one of the world's worst records on the ecological sustainability of our unique island continent. I ask members to consider cane toads; feral animals such as goats, foxes, cats and pigs; the possible spread of zebra mussels, which would destroy the pearling industry; plant and animal extinctions—I believe in that area we are at the very top of the world tree, if there is such a thing; and something even more disturbing, the possible collapse of our honey bee industry. I suggest to members that those examples indicate that mistakes can and do happen. My contention is that if we go down this pathway, those particular mistakes will more than likely continue. I fear that if the horse has bolted in relation to GM canola and GMOs generally, maybe the chickens are going to come home to roost and history is going to reflect very poorly on decisions that we make in Western Australia in 2010.

A number of issues have been raised previously in relation to GM canola and GMOs generally. All the issues that members raised on Tuesday are cause for concern. For the record, I maintain that the most significant of those issues is contamination. It is going to happen; it is inevitable. There will be litigation between farmers; there will not be litigation against Monsanto. I did a Google search last week to look at Monsanto's behaviour and the control that Monsanto will have over the seed industry. I had something in excess of 63 000 hits for a search for "Monsanto buys seed companies". Members can work it out. That particular multinational monopoly company simply wants to control the world's food supply, and we are going to be dancing to its tune.

Farm viability will be an issue stemming from the rising costs and the methodologies of companies like Monsanto. I think Hon Philip Gardiner mentioned glyphosate issues. Weed resistance seems to be inevitable. Of course, members have also talked about marketing issues. These issues impact very much on the claims made by a number of farmers who have taken up the Monsanto offer. These particular farmers talk about the rights of the farmer. I will quote from an email I received from a PhD student named Dylan Copeland who lives on his family's central Wheatbelt farm. To my way of thinking, this young student summed up the rights issue in an email dated 29 April, which most members will have received. He said —

... **Rights cannot exist in isolation. Any "right" is necessarily balanced by an "obligation."**

...

It is all very well to stress the rights of farmers to access GM crops, but this is at the expense of the majority of farmers who do not want GM canola, either through cropping or contamination. It is also at the expense of consumers who have demonstrated time and time again that they do not want to eat GM produce either directly (in their own foods) or indirectly (as animal feed).

Finally, given that contamination is inevitable and that labelling laws in this country are a joke—there is a message there for the government—I fear that Minister Redman's decision will only add to the litany of poor biosecurity, biodiversity and agricultural viability decisions that have been made in this country over the past 200 years. Precaution is better than trying to find a cure, particularly when there is no going back. I urge the Liberal-National government to adopt this particular precautionary approach. Now that the decision has been made, I think the government needs to make haste very slowly and give consideration to all the issues that were raised earlier this week. If it can do that, there may well be some sort of long-term solution, but I fear that that will not happen.