

GENETICALLY MODIFIED GRAIN CROPS

**136. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Premier:**

Before I ask my question, I would like to thank the Speaker for his heartfelt apology last week for denying my supplementary question; it is much appreciated!

**The SPEAKER:** You are welcome, member for Collie–Preston.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I refer to the Premier's recent trip to Japan related to science and technology and his meeting with major Japanese grain importers.

- (1) Did the Premier advise the Japanese grain importers that he opposed the use of genetically modified technology in Western Australian wheat production?
- (2) If he now opposes the use of GM technology in Western Australian wheat production, will he withdraw the \$9 million in funding for GM grain research announced by the government and the Minister for Agriculture and Food?
- (3) Does the Premier support the National Party's policy for GM for all crops?
- (4) What is the Premier's and his government's position on the use of GM technology in WA, especially with wheat?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:**

- (1)–(4) I met with the Flour Millers' Council of Australia and it showed a preference for the old Australian Wheat Board. I explained that those days had well and truly gone. I also had discussions about the amount of wheat that we sell to Japan. As an aside, if I may, it struck me that for too long in trade negotiations, Australian governments have been banging on about free trade agreements and barriers to entry. Western Australia, in a normal year, sells about 850 000 tonnes of noodle wheat, which is comparable with and exceeds Japan's own total wheat production of 800 000 tonnes. Therefore, it could hardly be said that we do not get access to that market. The Japanese importers were at great pains to emphasise that high-quality Western Australian wheat was a premium product for them. They were concerned about whether supply would continue and understood the drought year that we have had. The conversation went on to drought-resistant varieties of wheat and the like and I described some of the work being done by farmers. I said that I was impressed that even in the very extremes of the eastern Wheatbelt, despite the conditions experienced last year, many growers had produced a crop, which I think is quite remarkable in reflecting their farming techniques. When we got to the area of GM or drought-resistant varieties and other issues, I made the point that our policy has been to have GM canola, which has been introduced, and also GM cotton in the north of the state by the Ord River. I said we did not have a policy for, and would not be having, GM wheat. That was the conversation; that was it. If the member thinks we should not be involved in research and development of drought-resistant varieties, I disagree with him. We should be involved in the science of trying to ever-improve the productivity of our grain. We should always continue in science, but the policy of this government is GM canola and GM cotton, and that is all.