

GENE TECHNOLOGY BILL 2001

1172. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

I refer to the Gene Technology Bill 2001, which was introduced into the other place in August 2001, and is now in the consideration in detail stage.

- (1) Is the minister aware that this important Bill, which in the minister's own words will enable the State to retain control of its destiny in this highly sensitive area, has not been progressed in the other place for almost six months?
- (2) What reason has been given by the Greens (WA) for holding back the progress of the Bill, because development in this area may assist with improvements in the area of salinity?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

- (1)-(2) I understand the first part of the question, which asks if I am aware that the Bill has been held up in the other House, but I am not sure I understand the second part of the question.

Hon Murray Criddle: A lot of good things will flow from that Bill that could assist with salinity issues.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Indeed; however, I am not aware of any Greens members holding seats in the lower House.

Hon Murray Criddle: They have influence.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Although I query the questions, I agree with the spirit behind them. I believe that the Gene Technology Bill 2001 is an important piece of legislation. Although the state legislation is still incomplete, we are covered by the commonwealth legislation. It is not as though this is an area for which we do not have legislation. I will be travelling to Sydney - not Melbourne as was previously arranged - to take part in meetings that will be held prior to the primary industry ministerial council meetings in early May. I will meet with my colleagues to discuss an important part of the application of the commonwealth-state agreements under the commonwealth Act; that is, those parts of the agreements that permit the State to determine the grounds on which it may decide whether commercial crops in the whole or parts of the State should be genetically modified or free of genetically modified organisms. It is important for us to gain an understanding of the point of view of other ministers. The States of Tasmania and Western Australia will lead that part of the debate because they have taken positions on that matter. Once we have determined that to our satisfaction, the way will be clear for us to implement the policy we forecast prior to the election.

I agree with the member. The passage of the state Bill is important. However, at this stage it is not so important as to warrant it occupying a higher position in the Government's priorities in the Legislative Assembly. I hope that we will soon be in a position to have that Bill pass through the Legislative Assembly.