

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CANOLA — SPILLAGE THREAT

435. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I refer to a truck carrying 30 tonnes of genetically modified canola that caught fire and dropped its load near Williams yesterday, sparking fears from the police officers that nearby properties would be contaminated by GM seed.

- (1) Is the minister aware that the Shire of Williams wishes to remain GM-free?
- (2) If nearby GM-free canola farms in Williams become contaminated with GM, will the government compensate those farmers; and, if so, by how much?
- (3) With fears of contamination now threatening Williams farms and Steve Marsh's organic farm already destroyed by this crop, will the minister finally admit contamination is a real risk?
- (4) Will the minister stop sitting on his hands on this issue and put a stop to the GM canola farce and put in place compensation for those affected by the minister's ill-conceived and rash decision to introduce GM crops without the appropriate safeguards?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

- (1)–(4) I thank the member for Collie–Preston for the question. When I look back on the history of questions the member has asked, he really is a one-question wonder. With all my research —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Rockingham is right; we have not made much progress in question time today. I suggest to members on both sides of this place—if they want question time to continue—that I have been very lenient today. I just want an answer from the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I expect the member for Collie–Preston will listen to the answer, and I will give him the opportunity to ask a supplementary question.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I was very concerned about the incident. I was very concerned for the welfare of the truck driver; that was my first concern. I have had confirmation that during the incident the truck driver was okay.

What this highlights, certainly on the part of the opposition, is ignorance about the farming community and its management of segregation within the farming systems. CBH and the farmers themselves, right through our supply chain, manage segregation of hundreds of different varieties of seeds, let alone different types of crops. Part of that system is actually transporting grain throughout Western Australia to get to the ports. In this case, as I understand it, the truck was contracted by CBH, in this case to transport some GM canola. I am not sure where it was destined for. I am assuming it was destined for the grain centre in Perth.

It is unfortunate, but as I understand it, as a product of the differential running out of oil, heat was generated under the truck, which then caught fire. The truck came to a halt. It then burnt a hole in the bottom of the tray, which put a quantity of canola onto the ground. I do not know whether members have seen a picture of it, because there is a picture in the media. This is an issue of grain that is allowed to be grown in Western Australia dumped on the side of the road as the product of an accident with a truck. There is nothing special about this incident. It is unfortunate that an incident has happened in which someone has put themselves at risk as a product of a fire on a truck. What has happened here is that CBH has put in place —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Leader of the Opposition, I formally call you to order for the second time today.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen, welcome. I formally call you to order for the first time today.

Everyone may have an opinion on what is right and what is wrong. I do not want to hear 58 different opinions every time someone is asked a question. I simply want to hear from the Minister for Agriculture and Food and to give the opportunity to the member for Collie–Preston to ask a supplementary.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

This is an issue that CBH is managing as it would manage any grain spill. It has a site management plan in place, which is standard procedure for grain spills. Again, this is not new; it is simply a seed that farmers are authorised to grow. There has also been support from the Department of Agriculture and Food with advice around procedures following this event to ensure that no volunteers come through.

Coming to the question highlighted by the member, I am certainly aware that within some shires issues have been raised about concerns with GM crops. Again, that is not new; that has been a part of the public commentary for some time. I am very aware of the position of the Shire of Williams on GM crops. In terms of the crops at the

site of the incident, I am not aware of there being any organic crops. Certainly there are some non-GM crops. Again, I have confidence in industry being able to manage segregation within farm management systems.

Mr C.J. Tallentire interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Gosnells! I formally call you to order for the first time today. If you want to ask a question, stand and ask a question.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: This is not a new issue for the farming community. I have confidence in the community's handling and management systems to manage segregation for coexistence in Western Australia. The incident with this truck does not, from my perspective, put that issue in jeopardy. What they need to be measured by are the actions industry takes, the response it takes to these issues, because it is not new that different grains get mixed up. The industry manages that very, very well and I have confidence that industry can deal with this issue. I also have confidence that all the people growing canola in the Williams shire will be able to manage and to sell their canola in accordance with whether it is a non-GM or GM variety. Again, they can market the crop accordingly.

This government is certainly not sitting on its hands, as the member highlighted. In all the research that I have done on the shadow minister for agriculture, I have heard commentary from the member on only a handful of issues. He wants to shut down the live export trade. He also wants, as the shadow minister for forestry, to shut down forestry in Western Australia. And he is doing his darnedest to make it as hard as hell for the agricultural sector as well, because it is trying to make a go of it in Western Australia.