

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CANOLA — SHIRES' OPPOSITION TO CROP TRIALS

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

Western Australia will soon be trialling genetically modified canola crops across the state, and Boyup Brook, Manjimup, Wagin, Wandering, Fremantle, Serpentine-Jarrahdale, Toodyay, Woodanilling, Goomalling, Williams, Plantagenet, Carnamah and Tammin shires have decided to declare themselves GM crop free.

- (1) Will the minister agree to requests from these shires to declare that no GM canola be grown in their municipality for the next three years?
- (2) Will the minister force the shires of Wagin and Woodanilling, which fall within the crop trial area, to take part in the trials?
- (3) Will the minister inform the house how he will prevent contamination extending to farms in the neighbouring non-GM crop shires of Goomalling, Tammin and Williams?
- (4) Will the minister force the shire of Williams to accept transportation and storage of GM crops?

**Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:**

- (1)-(4) I thank the member for the question and for his interest in this matter as shadow Minister for Agriculture. It is good to see that the ostriches have pulled their heads out of the sand and asked a question on this issue.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Leading up to the election, this Liberal-National government gave a commitment to lift the moratorium on GM cotton in the Ord River irrigation area, which it has done. It also gave a commitment to put in place commercial trials of GM canola in Western Australia. In doing that, I have written out the exemption order. That allows for trials at up to 20 sites of up to 1 000 hectares. We are working through the process now to see exactly which farmers will take part in the trials. A number of arrangements are being put in place for the agreements between the farmers and Monsanto, and agreements between the farmers and the Department of Agriculture and Food. We all must understand—I certainly do as minister—the level of contention that this issue raises within the community. There are various views and, as a result, a lot of representations have been made to my office, but not once have I knocked back anyone who has made contact seeking a response to his or her questions. I have also met a range of groups, not the least of which are from traditional areas, that have had a chance to put their views. A question without notice was asked in the upper house that related to —

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Answer this question.

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** I am getting to that. That question on notice was in relation to shires that put forward the viewpoint that they did not want GM trials within their shires. Shires have no formal authority through which they can seek to restrict the trials that the state government intends to allow.

An opposition member interjected.

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Of course; I do not want to be provocative and allow GM trials in a very GM-sensitive area. That is why my response to that question in the upper house was, as it is to this question without notice, that it is not my intention to allow GM trials in a shire that has determined it does not want them, simply because I do not want to be provocative about the issue. However, that will not stop me from implementing government policy with respect to GM canola trials in Western Australia. But, of course, I will listen very closely to the shires that have those viewpoints. A number of shires have put forward their views, which I believe went through the Western Australian Local Government Association. I have some feedback from WALGA regarding shires that had motions on their books, which, in some cases, were moved six or seven years ago. In some cases, the motions have not attracted recent discussions because of the short time frame that the Western Australian Local Government Association had in which to provide a response. WALGA has, therefore, used existing motions on the books. But WALGA has not raised the issue as a point of fresh discussion.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** In the end you will force them.

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** We put in place processes to ensure that all the farmers who are involved must engage in the stewardship program.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am sure Hansard is having some difficulty understanding what the minister is saying, as are other members in this place. I note that the member for Collie-Preston is not interjecting at any great level

because he has a great interest in what the minister is saying. I say to every other member in this place: at least let the member who has asked the question hear what the answer is. He might not like it but at least he should be able to hear the answer.

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. We are working through a process. Yes, some shires have put a view forward. Largely, it is a political view, and, in some cases, the numbers in the vote have been very close. In some shires the issue has been quite divisive. It is certainly not my intention to be provocative about the location of the trials. However, we will move forward on this; it is government policy.

In response to the last question about contamination—albeit I do not much like using the word “contamination”—a level of adventitious presence does drift from a GM-crop to a non-GM-crop.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Adventitious presence?

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Yes. If the Leader of the Opposition listens carefully, I will go through a couple of things that he probably needs to be aware of. Firstly, under his watch, he supported a ministerial council position that, for something to be considered non-GM, it must be less than 0.9 per cent “adventitious presence”, to grab the terminology. The Leader of the Opposition’s government, on his watch, supported that position through ministerial council. It is an international standard, and I support that, which means that for a crop to be considered to be non-GM, it must have less than 0.9 per cent adventitious presence. Right now we can buy seed from the eastern states, and those seed merchants can guarantee only that it is less than 0.5 per cent adventitious presence. I would be very surprised if anyone could put his hand on his heart and say that there is no GM out there. We must therefore work on the basis of tolerance levels.

The member asked about contamination of other crops. If we grow GM crops on this site, whilst it is a strong self-pollinator, it does cross-pollinate. The further away one is, the less is the level of adventitious presence. Part of these trials is to assess our capacity to segregate down to 0.9 per cent adventitious presence, so that farmers will have a choice to be involved with this technology or not to be involved with it, and they may even choose to get some possible niche markets for non-GM canola.

I think I have adequately answered that question. This government is over this issue; this government is moving forward; and this government is progressive. From the top down, the Liberal-National government is supporting agriculture in Western Australia.