

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS FREE AREAS ACT — REVIEW

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

I refer to the submissions relating to the review of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003.

- (1) Does the minister recognise that this legislation fails to provide mechanisms for local governments, such as the Shire of Manjimup, which has declared itself GM free, to have a rightful input into the state's decisions on GM crops?
- (2) Does the minister concede that the state government has ignored the choices and decisions of local governments, which are made up of local landowners, producers and citizens around Western Australia who oppose GM crops?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

- (1)-(2) I thank the member for the question, and, of course, for his strong interest in this matter. I find it a really interesting question in the first instance. I say that because the member is drawing my attention to the shortcomings of the legislation. It was the member's government that put that legislation in place. Therefore, how can I stand with any confidence and answer a question about the shortcomings of this very legislation that the former government put in place in 2003?

The issue of genetically modified crops and the issue of GM policy are contentious. There is no doubt about that. I attended a rally that was held at the steps of Parliament at 12 o'clock today. I had a chance to say a few words at that rally. There were people at that rally who have strong views about GM crops. There is also a strong sense in the farming community that farmers want to take up the opportunities provided by this technology to assist their farm businesses to become profitable, to maintain a level of profitability and to compete against international markets, which are extremely competitive.

The member referred to the legislation's failure to recognise shires and their viewpoints. I have maintained from the outset that this is not a local government issue; it is a state government issue. If the member thought it was a local government issue, he would have insisted in 2003, when the legislation was drafted, that it refer to a local government decision.

Mr M.P. Murray: So local people don't have a say?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: This is not a local government decision; this is a state government decision.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie-Preston!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We have taken a very cautious approach to the matter in Western Australia; we have taken a science-based approach to it. We have lifted the moratorium on growing genetically modified cotton in the Ord River irrigation area. It would be good to ask ourselves whether the garments we are wearing are made of GM cotton. It would be a huge hypocrisy if we maintained a strong position against GM crops, yet we wear clothes that may well be made of GM cotton. Of course, we have also initiated trials of GM canola in Western Australia. We have taken a cautious approach to those trials. They are being done very carefully; there are strong protocols for the management of those trials. The progress of those trials this year will be reported to me in the near future, and of course I will consider decisions for next year.

The member also referred to the review of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act. That review, which is provided for in the act, is happening as we speak. The reviewer, Mr Greg Calcutt, will base his review on the submissions that are made and a range of viewpoints that he seeks, and he will present his report to Parliament on 24 December this year. People have the opportunity to make submissions. The member for Collie-Preston, along with other members, has a chance to put his particular viewpoint.

I am sure the member asked the question today on the basis that a representative group held a rally at the front of Parliament. At the end of the remarks made by the shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food, he thanked Greenpeace. I thought it was an interesting comment to come from the member.

Mr M.P. Murray: It is our social conscience!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I am sure it would have caused some mixed feelings in the member, who stands by the coal industry!

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie-Preston, before I allow you to ask a supplementary question, and I will allow you to ask a supplementary question, I suggest that if you are going to interject—people in this place know that I give some leniency on interjections to members who ask questions—you do it in a more appropriate manner. I formally call you for the first time. Now you can ask your supplementary question.