

AGRICULTURE, PROTECTION FROM CONTAMINATION

Hon J.A. SCOTT to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

- (1) Does the minister or his department intend to introduce zones to protect organic agriculture from genetically modified contamination and from herbicides, pesticides and chemical contamination used in conventional farming?
- (2) If not, is this because the Gallop Government does not consider organic farming an important industry?
- (3) What assistance does the Government intend to give the organic agriculture industry to ensure that its produce and its clean green marketing image is protected when GM crops are introduced?
- (4) Has the minister abandoned the Government's policy that provides for a five-year moratorium on the commercial release of GM crops?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1) The proposal to define areas designated for GM or non-GM crop production could well assist the organic farming industry, which is one of the reasons the current public consultation process on GM-free zones is important. I trust the organic industry will contribute its views on designated areas. However, the consultation process relates only to GM and non-GM crops, not to inputs of chemicals, which may be used for the production of either crop.
- (2) The Government considers organic farming an important industry. I note that this industry has relied on self-regulation thus far, and its progress is commendable. I would regard the issue of chemical contamination from conventional farming sources most seriously. Any concerns the industry chooses to express concerning chemical contamination will be examined in detail. However, I am pleased to report that very few complaints of contamination are brought to my attention.
- (3) The Department of Agriculture is taking a prominent role in national policy development regarding minimum certification standards for organic products. I feel this is a key issue which must be resolved if the organic industry is to achieve its full potential in international and domestic markets.
- (4) The Government's position on GM crops recognises that the national regulatory system for genetically modified organisms commenced on 1 July 2000. The Government intends to pursue the activation of section 21 of the Gene Technology Act 2000, through the Gene Technology Ministerial Council, to allow the creation of GM and GM-free zones for marketing purposes. I expect that community feedback in response to the GM-free zones discussion paper will assist the Government in this process. However, the Government is quite prepared to revert to a moratorium against commercial GM releases in the event that it believes the regulatory system and associated protocols are not working. No commercial GM crops are grown in this State.