

DENMARK SHIRE COUNCIL — GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS

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

I refer the minister to the recent decision by Denmark Shire Council, which is in the minister's electorate, opposing the growing of genetically modified crops within its borders and ask —

- (1) How many shire councils in the minister's electorate of Blackwood-Stirling have now passed resolutions opposing the growing of GM crops?
- (2) Does the minister believe he is representing the wishes of the people of his electorate by pushing ahead with the GM canola crop trial?
- (3) If every shire council in his electorate is opposed to the growing of GM crops, will the minister change his stance on GM canola trials?
- (4) If every shire council in his electorate is opposed to the growing of GM crops, will the minister consider resigning as Minister for Agriculture and Food due to the obvious conflict of interest that will, in all probability, be judged at the next election?

Several members interjected.

Mr M.P. Murray: Who are you representing: Monsanto or your electorate?

The SPEAKER: Order, members! If the member for Collie-Preston's last remark was part of his question, he needed to remain on his feet to ask it. If, in fact, it is a supplementary question, the member will have to seek the call after his initial question has been answered. Please keep that in mind.

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

- (1)-(4) Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will make a number of comments about the shires in my electorate.

Following certain shires' decisions to remain GM free, a question about the GM trials and my intentions was put on notice in the upper house by Hon Paul Llewellyn. The notable example at the time that question was posed was the Williams shire and its outspoken position on GM crops. In my response to the question I said—as I have said before in this house in response to questions from the member for Collie-Preston—that it was my intention to avoid trials in those particular shires. It is interesting to note that of the 20 trial sites that I announced two weeks ago now, 17 of which are on farms, there is effectively one in a shire that holds a formal on-the-book position about a desire to remain GM crop free, and that happens to be in the City of Albany. One trial is located in the south Stirling area in the City of Albany. It is interesting that after the shire councillors' deliberations, the vote was six to five in favour of the motion. I would not suggest for a minute that that is a very strong position from which to suggest that that is what the people of that shire want.

The notion bandied around by the Greens (WA) and the opposition is that 40 per cent of shires have said no to GM trials and that trials are being conducted in the 40 per cent of shires that have said no to trials. That is absolute garbage. It is absolutely wrong. There is one shire that had a vote of six to five in favour of a motion to remain GM free—a decision made after the announcement of the trial locations. I think that I have been reasonably effective in influencing the end location of trials. I have said that I was not directly involved with that process, but I have had influence on the end decision to try to avoid shires that are concerned about being a part of GM trials in order not to intentionally antagonise those shires. The moratorium on genetically modified crops stands in the shires in my electorate. No shires in my electorate have GM trials; in fact, it is illegal to do so. Unless the minister issues an exemption order, people in those shires cannot grow GM canola. I have effectively maintained the position in my electorate; there are no GM canola trials in any shires within my electorate. I do not understand the point of the member's question. We have made our position on GM crops very clear. We have lifted the moratorium on the growing of GM cotton in the Ord River irrigation area. We have also moved to have commercial trials this year, largely to look at our capacity to segregate, to embrace the opportunity of using this technology for agriculture, and to move forward and be competitive in the international arena.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Other members in this place might have better questions than, or better answers to give to, the question that the member has asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food, but I ask them to do so afterwards. At the moment I want to hear from the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I am certainly not going to resign from this position. I have said that I am moving forward in a very cautious and considered way, and that is exactly what we are doing. One of the good outcomes from these trials is that it will put the subject on people's agendas and they will do some reading on it and get some information. Information is available on the Department of Agriculture and Food's website. People can look at that information, respond to questions and inform themselves about the technology. That will be a really good outcome from the trials this year. It will mean that more and more people will be informed of the potential benefits and will certainly have the opportunity to provide feedback to me, as a representative of government, so that I can make a good decision about agriculture in Western Australia.