

GENE FREE AND GENETIC ENGINEERING AREAS

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

With reference to part 3 of my earlier question on gene-free and genetic engineering areas, I was not asking about a regulatory mechanism, but about how the minister will decide which areas will involve genetic engineering; whether it will be a democratic process or whether it will be imposed on people. Those are the questions that many people would like answered.

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I was sure that the member's intent was that I should comment on the administrative process! I sincerely hoped he would not ask the question he just asked. It is a fascinating issue that will be determined in consultation with industry and a number of other stakeholder groups. I place emphasis on the fact that stakeholder groups other than industry exist in connection with the ongoing process of genetic modification.

Hon J.A. Scott interjected.

Hon KIM CHANCE: It is an issue that must be resolved by the community. My principal concern is to ensure that we have the legal framework available to put that decision in the community's hands. The member has embarrassed me, because I do not have a clear picture of just how that will be done. It is a matter for the community. It is a matter on which the Government will be receptive to community input. The outcome might be as simple as dividing the State into two zones north and south of the twenty-sixth parallel, and declaring everything south of the twenty-sixth parallel a genetically modified free zone; indeed, I imagine that a number of people would strongly support that view.

Hon J.A. Scott: I know some who would strongly object to it.

Hon KIM CHANCE: An even more extreme view than that has been put to me; that is, that the whole State of Western Australia should be declared a GM free zone. I mention those two somewhat radical propositions because both are possible under the legal protocols we have now established. I concede my embarrassment, because I do not know the answer to that question. The important point is that the people of Western Australia will be able to make those determinations because it is an extremely serious matter.