

GENETICALLY MODIFIED COTTON OIL

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

- (1) Can the minister confirm that oil from genetically modified cotton is being blended with other vegetable oils and sold to unwary consumers, who assume that they are making non-GM crop food choices?
- (2) Can the minister confirm that Western Australian consumers are currently unable to identify food products that contain genetically modified products?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

- (1)-(2) I thank the member for the question. I have been waiting for it for a long time, because the member for Collie-Preston made some comments about this matter during the recent rally. An article in *The Kimberley Echo* states —

... Mick Murray, promised to keep the ‘heat’ on Mr Redman, to ensure he listened to the rally’s demands to keep WA GM-free.

He is really keeping the heat on! The Liberal-National government has made two commitments in moving forward on GM crops. The first concerned the commercialisation of GM cotton, specifically in the Ord River irrigation area. I recently made an announcement on that matter. The decision went through cabinet and is fully supported by the community up there. Trials have been conducted in the Ord River area for some 10 years and there have been no adverse effects from either an environmental or agronomic perspective. In fact, the trial crops have yielded some eight to 10 per cent more than GM-cotton crops grown in other parts of Australia. Something like 90 to 95 per cent of cotton grown in Australia is genetically modified. There is no doubt that there is a likelihood of GM-cotton oil being in the food chain. There is no requirement to label that oil as being GM. Food Standards Australia New Zealand is the authority that makes representations on labelling. It does not require the labelling of oils that come from GM crops. That position stands. I guess it is a position that the former government indirectly supported, because I understand that the former government was a signatory to the position that Food Standards Australia New Zealand has taken. It is interesting that at a federal level, Hon Tony Burke has taken a positive line in supporting the science behind GM products and is trying to focus the public debate on science rather than emotion. When quizzed recently on an ABC radio program, he said —

The key principle needs to be one of food safety and food safety decisions need to be based on science, not superstition.

That is why my view is and the Government’s view is that it will be part of the jigsaw — part of the jigsaw in dealing with climate change, part of the jigsaw in dealing with the global food crisis.

We can’t pretend that there is some magic solution with genetically modified food that will solve every problem but with the challenges that we face, we need to open our minds and hearts and see what it can deliver.

The federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry supports the science on GM crops. Clearly, in all cases, we must move forward very cautiously and carefully. This government is doing exactly that. The decision on the Ord River area was made on the basis of a number of trials over a number of years that were done under the watch of the previous government. Clearly, that offers an opportunity for a potential broadacre crop for the Ord River irrigation area to sustain and support the development of that area. I even had long discussions with the Miriwung Gajerrong peoples in the Ord River area. I have discussed issues surrounding GM crops with them and they understand the position. They understand why that is also significant to the further development of the Ord River region.

On the question of labelling, it is something that has been very dear to me, and was the subject of a number of debates that I participated in whilst in opposition. Certainly, I am keen to take the debate up to the federal level, as I have already indicated. I will be raising issues that I regard as important. Part of that is the position taken on labelling, and also the level of compliance, which I think is another potential issue in our community.