

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FREE ZONES, SUBMISSIONS

**1191. Hon J.A. SCOTT to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:**

Further to question without notice 1184 asked by Hon Bill Stretch on 20 March 2002, I ask -

- (1) How were members of the general public notified that the genetically modified free zones discussion paper was available and that they could make submissions to the Department of Agriculture?
- (2) Is the minister aware that the submission by the Export Grain Centre Ltd Western Australia makes the claim that if the Canadian experience were replicated in this State, there would be a significant cost saving for farmers using genetically modified canola?
- (3) As that statement is completely at odds with the information on the Canadian National Farmers Union web site, and, in particular, the NFU policy on GM goods, which asks the Canadian Government to impose a moratorium on the production, importation, distribution and sale of GM foods until questions about acceptance, human health, environmental implications, technology ownership and farmer profitability are answered to the satisfaction of the majority of Canadians, will the minister take note of the NFU position when assessing the merits of the GM and non-GM zones? I have included that information as an appendix to my question.

**Hon KIM CHANCE replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question. I have a handwritten copy of the question, which I received a few moments ago.

- (1) By media statement, direct advice to identifiable stakeholders - such as local government authorities and farmers' representative bodies - and a series of advertisements in mass and rural media publications.
- (2) Yes, from my earlier reading of the submission. I have also glanced at the information the member has provided.
- (3) Yes, I will note the Canadian National Farmers Union position. Canadians appear to have formed a negative view of GMOs after what has been the second broadest and longest experience with GM crops in the world. Only the United States' experience surpasses it. The NFU has said that it regrets ever being involved with GMOs. At the recent Crop Updates 2002 conference in Perth I listened to a Canadian agricultural scientist whose specialty is canola. By Australian standards, he would be regarded as a pro-GM scientist. Although I saw clear evidence of yield and some financial advantages with GM canola crops, they appeared to be restricted to those areas facing hard-core chemical-resistant weed problems. Other than that, there seemed to be very little advantage, and no particular yield or chemical-use advantage. Sorting out the facts is a complicated process; it is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. The Canadian experience will be noted.

The People's Republic of China planned to shut its doors to all GM products yesterday. That caused shipments of canola from Argentina to be turned around or refused exit from Buenos Aires. China has softened that position, but I do not know whether it did so to allow finalisation of existing contracts. However, the decision by the authorities in China - which is a huge market - to close its doors to GM crops will raise the bar for the State when it carefully considers the question.