

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ISSUES — MINISTER'S TRIP TO NORTH AMERICA

1001. Mr M.P. Murray to the Minister for Agriculture and Food

I refer to the proposed trip by the Minister to North America to study Genetically Modified (GM) issues and I ask:

- (a) Will the Minister's study on GMOs include meeting with critics as well as supporters of the GM debate?
- (b) Under what areas of reference will the study tour focus on?
- (c) Which parliamentary members, staff members and agriculture staff members will accompany the Minister on this tour?
- (d) Why is the Minister going on this study trip, when the decision to grow GM canola has already been made?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

- (a) The visit was undertaken from 6 July to 20 July. It involved meetings and discussions with a range of people involved with the GM and non-GM supply chains in North America. This included companies, government policy makers, university based researchers, policy advisors and farmers. There was also the opportunity to assess US and Canadian consumer views as part of this travel. Meetings were held with parties involved in growing GM and non-GM canola, soy and corn in Missouri and Saskatchewan.
- (b) The focus was on potential economic development opportunities for Western Australia (WA) in the broad areas of biotechnology and biofuels, as well as trade, general agriculture policy, education and agricultural research and development. The objective was to gain a detailed first hand appreciation of cutting edge R&D activity and public policy development in these rapidly evolving fields.

There is a need to understand the timelines for GM development of 'consumer benefit' traits, such as improved nutritional value of food products, and 'farmer benefit' traits such as improved tolerance to drought and salinity. As some of this new technology is likely of a proprietary nature, we explored how WA could best gain access to the technology.

The potential of agro-energy crops and bio-refineries in WA appears substantial but the economic viability remains unclear. This visit helped to clarify opportunities and priorities for research to support such innovation in our State.
- (c) I was accompanied by my Chief of Staff (Mr Scott Mitchell) and senior officer of the Department of Agriculture and Food (Dr Mark Sweetingham).
- (d) In relation to GM canola, the only decision I have taken to date is to allow restricted commercial-scale trials in this current season under an exemption order of the *Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act (2003)*. The visit had a far broader scope and purpose.