

GENETICALLY MODIFIED PRODUCTS

Statement

HON JIM SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [5.39 pm]: I intended yesterday to add my congratulations to those of my colleague Hon Christine Sharp to the Minister for Agriculture for the decision he made on the gatekeeper approach to genetically modified products in this State. It was rather interesting to me that following his decision, a flurry of criticism came from the proponents in that industry. What was particularly concerning about it was that the media around Australia has taken up, without any proper examination of the facts, the information put out by those people and printed it as fact. The first effort I saw was in *The West Australian* of 24 March which reported Mr Edwards as saying that Monsanto Roundup Ready canola accounted for more than half of Canada's production, yet Canada increased its exports by 30 per cent since the GM variety introduction and had taken market share off Australia in Japan. I pointed out to the writer of that article, Cathy Bolt, that evidence had been given to the committee that the reverse was in fact true; that Australia, whenever it had sufficient supply, had been eroding the Canadian market in Japan even though the Canadians still had the largest share because the Japanese could not get enough non-GM canola. In fact, a major buyer told the committee that if it could buy only non-GM food, it would. That was the truth of the matter. I pointed that out to the journalist, yet there have been no corrections to the article. Even though I had spoken to the journalist at length about some of the issues raised in the article, there was a two-page spread in Saturday's *The West Australian* that extolled the virtues of GM crops and ran the lines of the proponents of GM crops without any critical examination of the facts whatsoever.

I will further refer to marketing. It was reported in *The West Australian* that -

Tasmania has declared itself GM-free and South Australia is in the process of legislating a three-year "pause" on releases. Should the NSW Government make a similar decision in the next couple of weeks, production of GM food crops in southern Australia will effectively have been shelved.

That is despite evidence from the Department of Agriculture's own market research that shows less than one per cent of WA's current export markets for canola will not take GM grain.

That is simply nonsense. The committee was told that if the Japanese could buy non-GM products, they would. The Department of Agriculture's research did not ask which product the market preferred. The Department of Agriculture is saying that because the market cannot get anything else, they have to buy GM foods. That is the difference. We have a competitive advantage. This is poor research from the Department of Agriculture and the journalist, even though when the comments were made, I told the journalist the facts.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Are you happy with the use of Triazine?

Hon JIM SCOTT: I am not happy with the use of the glyphosate for that matter. Hon Bruce Donaldson does not want to stick to the facts, and he wants to digress. The article has a list of the pros and cons of GM crops. It reads -

Ability to boost levels of things like vitamin A (golden rice)

I pointed out to *The West Australian* journalist that to get a boost in vitamin A in golden rice, a person would have to eat eight kilograms to reach the daily allowable daily limit.

Hon Frank Hough: I thought it was 20.

Hon JIM SCOTT: It is eight kilograms. It is probably 20 kilograms after it has been cooked. More vitamin A can be found in brown rice with its husk still on than in golden rice. It is simply a marketing ploy. Another pro listed in the article states -

Increased yields (soy bean, canola, maize, wheat)

Yields of soya bean in the United States are four to six per cent less than yields of soya bean in Australia. That is documented. GM crops produce lower profits and use a greater amount of herbicides. The talk of increased yields in wheat and maize and so on is total nonsense. These products have not been developed to increase yield; they have been developed to be herbicide tolerant. The producers have not even tried to increase yields. There may be the odd situation in which an advantage is gained with regard to weeds. However, the overall yield does not increase. The Norton report stated that the Australian yield average for each State, which is very dependent upon seasonal conditions, is 1.27 tonnes a hectare. The best of the Roundup Ready trials yielded 17 per cent less than the Australian average and was equal to the lowest state average. The claims are not true. When we have these debates, I would like members to be properly informed and not be given a pile of rubbish by people who are pro-industry.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: We have two gene technology Bills to debate yet.

Hon JIM SCOTT: I am not talking about those; I am explaining why the Minister for Agriculture made a good decision. There is a huge push for GM crops in this Chamber and in the newspapers. It is interesting that *The Australian Financial Review*, which purports to be a magazine about investment, finance and good management decisions, has been saying that the States have taken a backward step by deciding to remain GM free. It cannot understand why the States are doing that. I would have thought the fact that 90 per cent of the world market prefers non-GM crops was a pretty good reason and that financial managers should take that into account. The fact that *The Australian Financial Review* cannot understand that seems to be a good reason to not take any notice of its determinations on marketing and finance.

An article in *The West Australian* refers to better flavoured tomatoes. The flavour-saver tomato was marketed because it could be kept in the fridge for longer; however, it had such an appalling taste that no-one ate it. That is why it disappeared from the market.

The article in Saturday's *The West Australian* refers to a better nutritional quality soya bean. That is not true, because the dietary benefits of products that require promoters such as bacterium and viruses are not better for people. They are a concern to people's health, particularly those products that have added antibiotic resistance, because they spread antibiotic resistance throughout the community.

Despite the comprehensive discussions that have been had and despite pointing journalists to the truth, *The West Australian* writes garbage. *The Australian* is also writing the same type of rubbish. It is time that our newspapers stopped conducting such shallow investigations and looked at the facts behind many of these issues. They would find that GM products have been hyped. They are in the same genre as some of the stories written by Ian Edwards, who has a large vested interest in promoting his own cause.