

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS — GROWERS REGISTER

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

I refer to the commitment that the minister gave to this house and to the people of Western Australia to establish a register of growers of genetically modified crops so that the process of introducing the first GM crops into WA would be transparent and open to all.

- (1) Did the minister mislead the house on 10 March 2010 when he made the following statement? It reads —

I am happy for GM growers to be identified on that system. I am also happy for organic growers to be identified on that system. I want to ensure that everyone knows where these people are, so that we can continue to deal with the challenges of working together, as we have done for many, many years in the farming community.

- (2) Why, in answer to a question on notice in April 2010, did the minister state that he will not now establish a register?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

- (1)–(2) I note that the member for Collie–Preston has had a couple of questions on the trot here; he is certainly getting his way in the party room, which is good!

Mr M.P. Murray: You pompous so-and-so!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The answer is no, I am not misleading the house. I will outline exactly the number of commitments I gave to the member for South Perth and a number of other members. I want to cite the letter that I sent and those former commitments that I gave. I confirm that I gave the following undertakings in that letter —

- The Department of Agriculture and Food ... will conduct a random audit of GM Canola farmers throughout this growing season to evaluate compliance with Stewardship Protocols. I will be provided with a report on this audit which I will table in the Parliament;
- Write to all farmers who choose to grow GM Canola this growing season, impressing on them their responsibility to adhere to Stewardship Protocols including the need to notify their neighbours that they are using this technology;
- The Department will contact all known organic growers recommending that they advise their neighbours of their organic status; and,
- The Department will build the capacity of its Geographic Information System ... to more accurately reflect the location of farmers using GM technology, organic farmers and other sensitive land uses. This information will be publicly available on the Department's website.

The member highlighted the statements that I made about being happy to have GM growers registered on the GIS. Of course I am happy. Of course I am happy to have organic growers represented on the geographic information system of the Department of Agriculture and Food.

Mr M.P. Murray: Have you made it compulsory?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: No. I simply cannot make it compulsory because —

Mr M.P. Murray: Ah! This is different from what you told the house.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: If the member would just listen to my response, he would hear that there are privacy issues, which means that I do not have access to the information. But what we have been able to deliver on through that geographic information system is information down to the shire level of the number of GM growers that are on that site.

Mr F.M. Logan: You have the power as the minister to find out that information and table it here.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Member, I have adhered to and will adhere to the commitments that I gave in this house in terms of moving through this process of allowing the farmers in Western Australia to be able to grow GM canola this growing season, and I stand by that. I did ask a question today and put back some notes to my agency following a briefing note that I signed just to chase up on a couple of issues, because I am genuinely following up this matter to ensure that we are adhering to my commitments in this place and ensuring that we are rolling this out in an appropriate way.

I highlight that it was really interesting to see just recently 70 000 hectares of GM canola growing this growing season. That has gone a step up from —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston, you know that I will give you an opportunity always to ask a supplementary question. That is not the way to go about asking a question. I formally call you for the first time.

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: The minister was quoting, as he said, from a letter or an official document. I ask that he be required to table that document.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Yes, I will table it.

The SPEAKER: I hear the minister say that he is happy to table it.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Yes, I am happy to table this letter. I regard this as public information. It is the letter that I wrote to the member for South Perth when we came to various agreements in terms of the votes of members of this place. However, I do find it really interesting that this season we had far in excess of expectations—70 000 hectares of GM canola grown in Western Australia.

[See paper 2184.]

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Clearly, the farming community of Western Australia is supportive of this initiative. The Liberal–National government has delivered on a technology that members of the farming community now have access to in order to meet the wide and varied challenges they face as far as agriculture is concerned in regional Western Australia.

I might add that with the recent rains, whilst some of them are late, it is really pleasing to see some of the rains going out to these regions to ensure that farmers have a half reasonable start to the season. Again, we certainly hope that the finishing rains come at an appropriate time such that we can get good yields to support the many challenges that farmers face in meeting their commitments this year.