

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS, FIELD TRIALS

**150. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:**

Given the State's decision to declare Western Australia a genetically modified crops free area and the minister's answer to my question without notice 7 on 2 March regarding Roundup Ready canola, I ask

- (1) Does the minister agree that benefits are to be gained from gene technology, including the development of crops that can tolerate climate and soil stresses such as drought, salinity and frosts?
- (2) What protocols has the Department of Agriculture drafted that will apply to field trials for GM crops?
- (3) Will these conditions be solely for market purposes?
- (4) If not, given that the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator's conditions for GM-canola trials were specifically to protect human health and environment, and, as a result, safety of human health and the environment has been confirmed, does the minister agree that the State applying human health and environmental safety conditions would be too onerous for gene technology companies to commit to without providing any great protection to Western Australia's non-GM status?

**Hon KIM CHANCE replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1) I agree that gene technology has considerable potential for Western Australian agriculture, including the possible development of crops that can have tolerance for drought, salinity and frost, as referred to by the honourable member. The Government's position on statewide prohibition of commercial-GM crops relates strictly to the marketing risks posed to the State's non-GM agricultural produce, which comes under section 21(1)(aa) of the commonwealth Gene Technology Act. The marketing risks posed by drought, salinity and frost-tolerant GM crops are difficult to assess at this point because none has been commercially released. There is, however, strong evidence that international markets would not accept herbicide-tolerant GM wheat. There would have to be some doubt about whether consumers in these markets would be any more accepting of other GM traits, such as the tolerance of a drought, salinity and frost.
- (2) The department has drafted protocols to assess applications for new field trials of the GM canola varieties that have been approved for commercial release by the Gene Technology Regulator. These protocols include a process for considering what conditions should be applied to manage the risks of GM material from these trials contaminating non-GM crops and supply chains, which could affect the marketing of those crops, and the subsequent monitoring by the department of compliance with those conditions. I will certainly consider the department's draft protocols when they are submitted to me.
- (3)-(4) Although the conditions will be for marketing purposes, they will necessarily be similar to those imposed by the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator on previous field trial approvals. This is because the OGTR conditions were designed to minimise the risk of contamination of non-GM crops and other brassicas, including feral weeds, during the course of the trials and throughout the post-trial monitoring period. Only by imposing similar conditions can Western Australian farmers and overseas and domestic consumers be assured that canola and other grains grown in Western Australia do not contain contamination by GM canola.