

**ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE**

**HON N.D. GRIFFITHS** (East Metropolitan - Minister for Racing and Gaming) [4.57 pm]: I move -

That the House do now adjourn.

*Genetically Modified Crops - Adjournment Debate*

**HON J.A. SCOTT** (South Metropolitan) [4.57 pm]: Over recent months and longer, I have been very interested in the huge string of overseas "experts" who are coming to Western Australia to convince our farmers and exporters to start growing genetically modified crops, particularly canola. One of the more recent experts was Terry James, vice president of James Richardson International Ltd. An article in the *Countryman* magazine of 5 April states -

Australian farmers should jump on board the genetically-modified canola train alongside Canada and reap the rewards, according to Canada's largest private grain company.

It continues -

Mr James said he wanted WA farmers to produce GM canola in a bid to increase competition in the international marketplace.

Australia is the second biggest canola producer in the world growing 1.2 million tonnes annually behind Canada's 4mt.

He downplayed consumer antagonism towards genetic food products in Europe and claimed people in North America now openly embraced soya beans, cotton and canola products.

It goes on -

Mr James made the comments during a visit to Perth last week as part of his nation-wide push to get Australian grain growers on side.

He said the agronomic benefits had returned 25 to 30 per cent more to the hip pockets of Canadian farmers and enabled year-round production.

"Europe is not a significant player whereas Australia's level of canola production is seen as a backstop to get us to the next stage," Mr James said.

"If Australia was producing the same canola products as us then we could compete on a level playing field.

"Then the Europeans will have no choice but to buy GMO canola."

Apart from his appalling lack of concern for the rights of consumers to choose what they want, this is a pile of hogwash. In fact, Australian canola growers have taken 500 000 tonnes of the Canadian-European market, precisely because the Europeans do not want the Canadian canola because they know it cannot provide them with products that are free from genetic engineering. It is hogwash, and that is borne out in further information received from Canada about the state of the farming industry in that country. The Canadian National Farmers Union annual convention passed a motion and agreed to a policy calling for a moratorium on the production, importation, distribution and sale of GM food. The preamble to the policy states -

The NFU believes that all Canadians--farmers and non-farmers alike--must engage in an informed debate on the genetic modification of food. Citizens must examine genetically modified (GM) food in the largest possible social, historical, environmental, economic, and ethical context. After that debate, citizens--not the corporations that promote these products--must decide whether to accept or reject GM food. Squeezed by falling incomes, farmers look to technologies that claim higher returns or reduced costs. Over the past decades, however, farmers have embraced a wide range of technologies, only to watch net farm incomes fall. Between 1974 and 2000, gross farm income tripled. Net farm income, however, fell. Input suppliers were able to capture 100% of farmers' increased gross returns. Because fertilizers, chemicals, and other technologies failed to fulfill their promises of farm profitability, many farmers rightly question the economic benefits of genetically modifying crops and livestock.

While the benefits are questionable, risks and costs are real. Consumers are rejecting GM foods. Markets in Europe, Japan, and elsewhere are closing and domestic markets are likewise threatened. This is driving prices down. Closing markets and falling prices threaten to overwhelm any small, short-term economic benefits that GM crops or livestock may offer. Further, the proliferation of some GM crops has effectively deprived many organic farmers of the option to grow those crops.

It is also apparent that the entire United States organic food market has been contaminated by GM pollen. United States producers are calling for less onerous restrictions on the definition of organic produce so that they can include GM-contaminated crops.

We in Australia are in a unique position. We cannot allow the Canadian and American marketeers to push these products on us. The companies undertaking these trials breach the trial conditions and cause contamination, and I am convinced that that contamination is deliberate. Aventis SA has polluted the entire United States corn crop, which has caused huge marketing problems. It also sent contaminated seed stock to Europe by "accidentally" mixing GM seed with other seed. It has also caused contamination problems in South Australia and Tasmania. We should keep that company out of this State. What is the regulator doing giving this company carte blanche to conduct trials in Western Australia when it cannot maintain the hygiene of these crops? The regulator has failed. It is impossible to prevent the spread of GM canola given that its pollen travels six kilometres on the wind. In extreme conditions, it could travel even further. The 500-metre buffers are inappropriate and they are a real threat to our market. We have a huge opportunity to break into European and Japanese markets that we have never had before.

I understand that the Japanese soy market is looking to Western Australian lupins to replace soy beans as they cannot get enough non-genetically engineered soy. Most of their soy comes from the United States, where it has been either genetically engineered or contaminated to some extent. Strangely enough, one of the experiments currently conducted in Western Australia is to grow genetically engineered lupin. Why would anybody in Western Australia want to do that? I think it is extraordinary. The Canadians and others are trying to pressure us into using genetically-modified material and that is only for one reason: they know that if we remain clean and green we will outsell them all over the world in every market. That is not a short-term thing; it is a long-term thing. The push is on to grow genetically-modified crops in Western Australia and we are being pressured by the Commonwealth to accept regulations that do not allow us to opt out. I hope the new regulations will help in that regard, but I have concerns that the new regulations can be challenged by the World Trade Organisation, as they will enable us to set aside specific areas. I fear the new regulations may not be strong enough given that Australia has WTO agreements in place.

I urge the Government to continue to push hard to ensure that genetically-modified products are not introduced into Western Australia. The Greens will look closely during the next federal election at the policies of the major parties in order to decide distribution of preferences because this issue is of critical importance in Western Australia. We will make sure that we follow through on our intentions.

*Drug Summit - Adjournment Debate*

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN** (South Metropolitan) [5.07 pm]: I thank the House for the opportunity to raise a matter. As members are aware, I make use of the adjournment debate only when I wish to raise a matter that I cannot raise through other options in the proceedings of the House.

The Liberal Party is of the view that drug strategy is a sufficiently complex and important area of policy that it requires its own portfolio. My party has asked me to take on that role and I am honoured to do so. In contrast, the Labor Government has done away with the specific portfolio of drug strategy and has placed it under the portfolio of health. That is the Labor Party's decision. My party disagrees with that degree of emphasis.

The Labor Party is still in the process of deciding its policy on illicit drugs and is intending to hold a drug summit. Indeed, everything else in this policy area seems to be on hold and all inquiries that touch in any way on matters of drug policy receive the response that there is going to be a summit and that people should wait and see what emerges from that. The Minister for Health, Bob Kucera, has invited the participation of the Liberal Party in a number of ways. We seek to have constructive input to the drug summit even though it is not the way in which the Liberal Party would have gone about it and we do not feel that the exercise is necessary to show the Liberal Party's stand on issues related to illicit drugs. Nonetheless, the party will attempt to participate constructively in the hope that positive outcomes can be achieved for the people of Western Australia.

One of the ways in which the drug summit will manifest itself is through some pre-summit activity. That will include community consultation. More will be made public about that as time goes by. Nine pre-summit issues groups have been set up to create issues papers, which are intended to be informative, educational and balanced. These papers will form the basis upon which the drug summit will seek public input and produce a body of information that delegates to the drug summit will be able to consider in August. Each of the issues groups includes one government and one non-government member of the Parliament. The Liberal Party was asked, very late in the piece, to participate in this exercise by providing members for these groups. The Liberal members include the opposition Whip in the Legislative Assembly, Mr John Bradshaw; the member for Carine, Mrs Hodson-Thomas; Hon Ray Halligan; Hon Robyn McSweeney, and myself. I was delighted that the former

Attorney General, Hon Peter Foss, also made himself available, despite the short notice and the fact that these issues group are already up and running, and met before the Liberal Party had been able to participate. I was able to respond yesterday, following our party room meeting on Tuesday afternoon, with a degree of good faith to say that the Liberal Party will participate, and was pleased to provide members at short notice. Hon Peter Foss wishes to participate in group No 7, which will examine drugs and law enforcement, including the most appropriate legal framework for illicit drugs, diverting drug users into treatment and treating the most serious offenders in prisons. I am sure both sides would agree that Hon Peter Foss is far and away the most qualified and experienced member in this place to assist in the development of an issues paper on those matters. However, I noticed that one of the Independents, Dr Elizabeth Constable, had already nominated for that group. I approached the drug summit office and argued that, although Dr Constable was a non-government member, she was not a Liberal member, nor a member of the official Opposition and that the Liberal Party felt Hon Peter Foss had a great deal more to offer this issues group. I asked whether he could participate in this group, even, if necessary, as an observer.

I do not know what is so difficult about that, because I know who the members of all the groups are - I have the lists. There are plenty of people from the substance users association sprinkled throughout the groups, and some of the groups have very few members, while others have far more. I fail to see what difference an extra member of one of these groups would make. Shortly after I sent the message, I received a reply through my office, saying that the community drug summit had said no to Hon Peter Foss, and that he was not to be given observer status. It took the office a long time to ask the Liberal Party to participate in the first place, but it did not take long to respond in this way to the nomination of Hon Peter Foss. The issues papers will be prepared, and I am sure the professional secretariats overseeing their preparation will make sure that they are balanced and so on; if they are not, I will raise that matter in the public domain in due course. It occurs to me that the Government either wants members of the Liberal Party to participate constructively in this process or it does not. We have received little notice of any of the events. I was telephoned by the minister himself the night before he announced the summit on the Sunday morning, which was the first contact we had had. He said he would like me to come to the announcement, and I replied, "Fine; is that the one on Sunday morning at 11 o'clock and is it at 223 High Street, Fremantle?" He confirmed that my information was correct. Members of the public told me all about the community drug summit before the Government was prepared to do so. Members of the public have their questions to public servants answered. I was not allowed to talk to anyone from the drug summit office until it had been formally announced. We now find we are too late to secure a position in this topic group.

If the Government is serious, members of the Liberal Party are prepared to participate, and if there is any disagreement about policy further down the track we can have that debate at the time. I wanted to raise this matter now, and I thank the Leader of the House for his attention. We have received quite a few barbs from the Government benches which tend to indicate that some of the government members hold this side of the House in contempt. Perhaps the matter I have raised is simply a case of bureaucracy being inflexible and not accommodating our request - that might be all there is to it - but I hope it is not a case of the Government holding us in contempt or genuinely not wishing to be inclusive. I hope I will be reassured that there is goodwill, and that the slight - and we do feel it was a slight - was unintended.

**HON KIM CHANCE** (Agricultural) [5.17 pm]: I have noted the comments by Hon. Simon O'Brien. I hasten to personally assure him that the Government did not intend a slight. The Government has a high regard for the views that have been expressed by the Opposition over the years, and this member in particular has put forward views which have been enlightening and which have provided encouraging support for a bilateral position. I apologise for the circumstances which have led the member to feel slighted in that way. The Government does not intend that the member should feel that way. I will raise the issues referred to in their full context with my colleague, the Minister for Health.

Question put and passed.

*House adjourned at 5.18 pm*

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