

WHEAT VARIETY WAWHT2248, RELEASE BY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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

The minister no doubt is aware of the wheat variety WAWHT2248, a soft, non-club wheat that has qualities such as sprouting tolerance and large grain size and which is eagerly accepted by the Australian Wheat Board for quality. The indications are that it also out-yields other soft varieties by 14 to 16 per cent. Farmers now also have technologies available to them such as fungicides capable of alleviating any rust problems. Bearing that in mind, why will the Department of Agriculture not immediately release this variety to allow economic benefits to flow to producers and the State?

**Hon KIM CHANCE replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

WAWHT2248 is a high yielding, large grained, non-club soft wheat with a reduced sensitivity to pre-harvest sprouting compared with existing soft wheat varieties. These facets make it very attractive to soft wheat growers. However, it is susceptible to all three rust types found in Western Australia; that is, leaf, stripe and stem. The Department of Agriculture has considered the potential to release WAWHT2248 with a fungicide-based leaf rust stewardship program. This concept was evaluated this year, but the exceptionally dry season has meant that the results were inconclusive. To collect more information on the effectiveness of fungicides to control the three rust types in WAWHT2248, the department will continue the evaluation of five properties over a broader geographic range in 2003. If an effective management plan can be demonstrated for the use of fungicides on susceptible varieties, the release of WAWHT2248 for soft wheat production will be considered. The stripe and leaf rust outbreak in susceptible varieties in the great southern over the past two years reinforces the need for the industry to grow only resistant varieties and conserve the rust-resistant genes in existing varieties. The department will continue to consider the interests of all wheat growers when making decisions about the release of varieties developed with government and collective grain grower funding. Hon Murray Criddle will be aware of the impact of a rust prone variety on neighbouring farms that are growing other crops that may be marginally sensitive. Such a problem existed with canna in the year after its release. Canna proved to be what farmers call a rust sucker and drew rust into neighbouring properties that were growing varieties other than canna. There is sensitivity about a multiple rust susceptible variety. However, I acknowledge the point that the member makes about fungicide technology and that it must be proved in practice before the department can release it with any confidence.