

INDUSTRIAL HEMP, RECLASSIFICATION

987. Hon M.J. CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

- (1) Has the minister reclassified industrial hemp as an agricultural product; if not, will this reclassification be completed in time to bulk up enough seed for planting in 2002?
- (2) Will the minister increase the maximum allowable amount of seed to ensure a viable commercial operation?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for some notice of his interesting question.

- (1) Low tetrahydrocannabinol cannabis, otherwise known as industrial hemp, is classified as a drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act and the Poisons Act. To achieve what the member refers to as the reclassification of industrial hemp, it will be necessary to amend those Acts so that low THC cannabis, containing 0.35 per cent or less THC, is no longer classed as a drug under these Acts. These Acts are not within my portfolio, so I am not in a position to reclassify industrial hemp. However, I am working with the Police Service and the Department of Health to develop legislation that will achieve this purpose. The legislation also needs to establish a scheme for regulation of the commercial production of industrial hemp, to avoid it being used as a subterfuge for the production of the cannabis drug for illegal purposes. I will seek a high priority for this legislation, but its introduction and passage may take some time, due to the significant legislative program for next year. Even if the legislation could be passed relatively early, it would be some time, however, before legal supplies of seed would become available in quantities for commercial planting. I need to qualify that answer to some extent, because I am aware of seed collection that is taking place, or has already taken place, in China. I understand that the department will be assisting with the import protocols for that seed. However, the seed will not be for commercial use but for private research.
- (2) I am not in a position to set, or increase, the maximum allowable amount of seed. While all forms of cannabis remain illegal, the Commissioner of Health has responsibility for the issue of licences to approved persons to undertake research on industrial hemp. The current system of licensing does not permit sales of hemp product such as fibre or seeds. Each application for a licence is treated on a case-by-case basis, but the principle is that licences can be issued for small-scale research trials. A seeding rate of approximately 50 kilograms of seed was used in the agronomic trials conducted by the Department of Agriculture and licensed farmers in 1996-97.