

## GLYPHOSATE

### *Grievance*

**MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont)** [9.49 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Health. It relates to the use of Roundup, a herbicide produced by Monsanto, the main ingredient of which is glyphosate. According to the Oregon State University National Pesticide Information Center, it is one of the most widely used weed controllers across the agricultural sector, and in metropolitan domestic and public sectors for use on gardens, lawns and in aquatic environments. In Australia, Roundup is also widely applied in the same areas and industries. According to research conducted by Kansas University in the US, resistance to Roundup is growing due to the persistent use of the product, which, in turn, requires more frequent use to have the same controlling effect on leafy weeds. A number of countries are now banning the use of Roundup. *The Guardian* reported last month that researchers are also now blaming glyphosate for wiping out whole populations of insects, which are critical to sustain ecosystems, plant and crop growth, and plant pollination. Germany has announced it will be phasing out the use of the chemical, as has France, with a ban to be put in place in both countries by 2023. The first phase of the ban will be to cease the use of the product in metropolitan areas. The first European Union member to ban its use was Austria, in July, and the Czech Republic, Italy and the Netherlands are now restricting its use. Although there is industry resistance to the restrictions, the science shows that a ban is necessary to prevent ecosystem collapse and maintain food production, noting that whole populations of bees and other insects that feed birds and animals and are, therefore, part of the food chain, have totally disappeared.

In the US in August 2018, Dewayne Johnson, a school groundskeeper, successfully sued Monsanto and was awarded almost \$400 million, claiming his extensive use of Roundup and another similar product, Ranger Pro, in his work, had caused him to develop non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. In July this year, Edwin Hardeman successfully sued Monsanto over the effects of Roundup, and was awarded a recently adjusted amount of approximately \$200 million. In the US, more than 11 000 plaintiffs are now suing Monsanto on the grounds that Roundup causes non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Earlier this month, the ABC reported that Ross Wild, a 67-year-old farmer from New South Wales diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, who used Roundup since it was introduced to Australian farming in 1976, is the first Australian farmer to sue Monsanto over Roundup. He believes his long-term use of Roundup caused his cancer. A 54-year-old gardener, Michael Ogliarolo, is also suing Monsanto for the same reason. Both men are suing the company on the grounds that the bottles and warnings to consumers are inadequate to protect users from the "claimed" cancer-causing effects of it.

In response to the case being brought by Ross Wild, this month the National Farmers' Federation denied the link between cancer and Roundup's main ingredient, glyphosate, calling it a "myth". The federal government also stated this month that it will not pursue changes to the regulation of glyphosate's use, with the federal Minister for Agriculture, Bridget McKenzie, referring to the current science that points to glyphosate products such as Roundup being safe to use. Despite denials from Bayer and regulatory authorities, the Cancer Council Australia and the International Agency for Research on Cancer have both raised concerns that there is a cancer-causing link to the product, and came to the conclusion in 2015 after hundreds of studies that glyphosate is in fact a "probable human carcinogen". The US state of California has now listed glyphosate as a known cancer-causing chemical.

In August 2016, the ABC reported that local governments across Australia were concerned about the use of Roundup by staff on both safety and environmental grounds, and many have begun to reduce or stop using the product to control weeds in their areas. I believe that, as a government, we should consider banning the use of Roundup for weed control by local councils in our state. Although regulators deny the evidence that glyphosate probably causes cancer, I believe our government should take the lead in Australia, and take the advice of the Cancer Council Australia and ban Roundup's widespread use in WA, particularly in metropolitan areas.

I believe that this government should not rely on the advice of the company Monsanto, which is protecting itself when it says that Roundup is safe for human use. As Robert Kennedy Jr, one of the lawyers involved in Dewayne Johnson case, said —

"The jury found Monsanto acted with malice and oppression because they knew what they were doing was wrong and doing it with reckless regard for human life," ...

My question to the minister is: is Roundup the asbestos of our time? In light of, arguably, an avalanche of cases against Monsanto and its product Roundup, many of which have been successful, should we as a government be taking a safer than sorry route by taking Roundup out of the system in WA, particularly when exposure to so many—that is, in metropolitan areas—is not just possible, but likely? For the sake of human safety and to protect the local ecosystems and food production on which we rely so strongly to feed our growing population, should

Western Australian follow the lead of European governments and phase-out the use of Roundup or glyphosate in our state as soon as possible?

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health)** [9.55 am]: I thank the member for bringing this grievance to us today. This is an issue around which many people hold concerns, and I am sure that those in her community do also. There has been an emerging range of literature and publicity in particular to glyphosate and the court case that involved Dewayne Johnson in the US, so I understand that it is an issue that will be raised with local members fairly frequently. For the information of the member, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority is the national regulating body for pesticides in Australia. The APVMA considered the evidence presented in that Californian case in October 2018 and found no grounds for taking regulatory action in Australia. The APVMA regularly reviews and updates advice on the safety of pesticide and takes appropriate action to restrict or ban the use of products for which new scientific evidence indicates a potential for human health or environmental impacts, such as was the case recently with the domestic formulations of products containing the insecticide chlorpyrifos. We continue to monitor the evidence raised from time to time and make sure that we take account of that.

There is a lot of discussion in the media that does not get the facts quite right in relation to the science. The International Agency for Research on Cancer's classification of "probably carcinogenic to humans" is often cited. The IARC's conclusion was arrived at on the strength of some animal studies and limited human studies. The Agricultural Health Study 2018, which followed 50 000 people in the USA for at least 10 years, showed that the risk of cancer was exceedingly small, and the risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma was negligible. Germany's Federal Institute for Risk Assessment indicated that glyphosate was neither mutagenic nor carcinogenic. The European Food Safety Authority in 2018 concluded that glyphosate is not expected to pose a risk to human health or the health of cattle, sheep, pigs, horses or chickens when used according to the label. A number of countries have taken steps to ban glyphosate based on the recent advocacy of the IARC classification.

In answer to the member's question, is it the new asbestos, I certainly hope not. But at the end of the day we are regulating poisons. This poison has great benefits to the farming community and has significantly improved the productivity of our agricultural industry. From that point of view, it is important that we move forward very cautiously. Having said that, I cannot see a great deal of reason for people in the metropolitan area, just for the purposes of clearing up weeds around footpaths and so on, to be unnecessarily exposed to poisons. That is not to say that glyphosate is dangerous to people; it is just simply saying that if people do not need to expose themselves to a poison, why would they? From that point of view, local governments in Western Australia can certainly choose not to use glyphosate on public land and premises within their control. I note that a number of councils are using steam-based products to control weeds and so on. Again, when I shop, I do not necessarily religiously devote myself to organic foods, but if I can consume a product or live my life in a way that exposes me to fewer poisons than I otherwise would be, ultimately that would be better.

I think the member is right to raise this issue. We can see an emerging body of evidence. We can see governments, both provincial and at a local level, taking steps around that, and so I think it is appropriate that we continue the community conversation. As I said, it has had a remarkable impact on the agricultural industry, so we should be very careful before jumping to big conclusions about how it might impact our food chain. I am encouraged about that by the European Food Safety Authority study in 2018 that suggested it has very little impact on the food chain.

We know that the world is facing increasing pressure about the reduction of the number of insects in our community, and I am sure that the impact of herbicides plays a role in that reduction. Therefore, why would local government authorities, with a non-agricultural industry exposure, use products that would necessarily be harmful to our insect world and things like that? I guess this is a question of who should tread carefully on the earth. We do not need to overreact with poisons, and I have a great deal of sympathy for what the member is saying. I notice, for instance, that the city of Toronto has banned the use of insecticides inside its metropolitan area. It simply says for the purposes of what is essentially managing an urban environment that it is not necessary, and I have quite a lot of sympathy for that approach, to be honest with members. That is, obviously, I think, the way of the future.

I want to ensure the member that we continue to monitor the scientific evidence very carefully in making sure that herbicides do not pose an unnecessary risk to the community. I think the member is absolutely right to point out that we should not see the unnecessary use of poisons, in our urban environment in particular, when there is no practical reason why we cannot utilise other means to achieve the same outcome. On that basis, I thank the member for delivering this grievance today.