

GRAIN PRODUCERS — FENITROTHION

849. Hon NIGEL HALLETT to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I refer to fenitrothion, which has been used since 1959.

- (1) Why are Western Australian grain producers who store grain on farms not allowed to use this product even when our eastern states counterparts are allowed to?
- (2) What chemical has replaced fenitrothion?
- (3) What is the cost and performance effectiveness in comparison?

Hon KEN BASTON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1) The nationally mandated export standard is for nil tolerance of insects in export grain. In Western Australia, it was decided that the best way to attain this standard was to not use fenitrothion and similar chemicals on farms because of predicted insect resistance to these chemicals. This has eventuated as a significant problem for grain growers in other Australian states. This decision was taken by the grain industry through the grain weevil liaison committee in the mid-1980s. In WA, fenitrothion and other similar chemicals can be used for storage, as long as they are applied by a registered seed cleaner. In addition, bulk handlers may use the chemical, but in WA's case CBH Group has not used fenitrothion on export grains since 1990.
- (2) A system of sealed silos and fumigation with phosphine is the Western Australian standard treatment. Phosphine resistance is very rare in insects. This has allowed Western Australian grain to be marketed as chemical residue-free, which is important for markets such as Japan and South Korea. There is an alternative treatment, diatomaceous dust, which can be used but does not meet the CBH standard because it impacts on the grain flow rate.
- (3) Phosphine is a cheaper treatment. Phosphine usually only requires a single treatment in a sealed silo. There are some additional initial capital costs to growers when purchasing a sealed silo, but the return on that investment will last for decades. The use of fenitrothion and similar chemicals in the eastern states requires a combination of different chemicals to be applied, depending on the insect species and resistance level, to achieve the nil insect requirement. However, grain undergoing this treatment can fail to meet the chemical residue-free marketing standard.