

**GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS FREE AREAS REPEAL BILL 2015**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 29 June.

**MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston)** [10.07 am]: It gives me no joy to speak against this bill today. I will give the reasons for that, which are many and varied. First, there was a major court case involving this issue, the Marsh–Baxter case, which I will speak about later. I will then speak about the way the act was changed to allow canola to be grown. I will also look at the way in which now, after intense lobbying from a minority group, this bill, after eight years, has been brought before the house. This government has been in office for eight years, and in the last four weeks of Parliament we are considering a bill that has only come about because the backers of the Liberal Party—the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and the Western Australian Farmers Federation—have pushed many people on the conservative side of politics into believing that the existing rules under the act should be abolished. I think this is very foolish.

Under this bill, the state will cede power to the federal government over what happens with genetically modified crops in Western Australian farming areas. There are no rules about where that control starts or finishes, and I do not know where it will end up. Is it a push—I am not saying that it is; I am asking a question—to introduce genetically modified wheat into Western Australia? I do not know, but I have a suspicion that that is the case. All of a sudden pressure is being applied in this area.

As I said, this bill has been eight years in the making, but let us look back at the previous legislation that allowed genetically modified canola to be grown in Western Australia. It is something that happened, and although the Labor Party opposes the introduction of genetically modified crops in Western Australia, it accepted that the government of the day could make that ruling. We asked for checks and balances to be put in; unfortunately, that was not done. The checks and balances would have been around contamination, about how it would be carted, and about whether the contamination would be on the land or in silos or anywhere else because it could in the future cause problems for the sale of our grains. We just cannot afford that, as we now understand how large the grain industry is. We cannot afford at any stage to mess that up. Unfortunately, when all the rules are taken away, that will happen somewhere along the line.

I have been looking at the rules we asked for when the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Bill 2003—I will call it the GM canola bill—came in. We asked for mapping to show where it would and would not be done. Some very broadbrush maps were put out into the field that showed that GM canola could be grown in certain areas. A GM-free area was not provided, although we asked for one. If that had happened, certain shires or areas may have been able to say, “We are GM-free”, and market under those conditions. Those crops from the GM-free area could have created a niche market that would have produced very, very high returns. Anyone who follows the grain industry understands that non-GM canola sells for anywhere between \$30 and \$70 a tonne above GM canola. Those people could have had a niche market. But, unfortunately, under the rules put in it was not the case. Shires were not able to band together and say, “We want to be GM-free.” In the early stages, the Shire of Williams wanted to be a GM-free area. But as life has it, a truck travelling through that shire caught fire, the tray burnt out and guess what was in the truck? GM canola that spread all up and down the highway before it was cleaned up. Even to this day people tell me—I can be corrected—that, given the spread of that canola, it is still up and down the road in that area. What they wanted and could have had was, in the end, overruled by a road accident. It was certainly not intentional, but it happened on that roadway and spread the GM seed through that area.

People told me they could keep it on their property. The farmers who want to grow GM canola say to me, “I want to grow what I want to grow on my property.” That is fine, but they need to remember that they have to keep it on their property. Anyone who knows the size of a GM canola seed—I am using canola as an example—knows that 1 000 can fit in my hand. Farmers need to keep that on the ground on their properties in wheatbelt areas where there is a multitude of willy-willies, storms—the whole lot—and it is transported on the back of trucks. It would be nigh on impossible to keep it in one area. The people pushing GM knew that very well; they knew exactly what would happen and the risk of contamination was taken.

Rules were not established around that, and that led to the Marsh–Baxter case that cost millions of dollars. Not all that money was able to be counted, because some of it was fed into a particular group through the back door—I mean that—to try to unseat the people who were against GM. The case was about an organic farmer who wanted to keep his place clear of GM and receive a premium for the products on his property. I think he was entitled to do that. Unfortunately, the existing law did not support him. In this house the minister of the time, Minister Redman, said it would never happen, after I asked a question about how it would be sorted out. He said, “Farmers will sort it out over the fence; it won’t go into the court system.” Well, it did go into the court system, and it was very hurtful. It split up people who had been mates since schooldays because there was not a law to deal with that. It also split up families, and that certainly happened in this case. It divided the farmers in that area

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into two groups, and it was very nasty in social circles; in fact, some people dropped their social circle because of their bias to a particular side—it does not matter which. But that is what happens when bills are brought in that do not cover the whole aspect of what they set out to do. It was certainly disappointing that the then Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Terry Redman, took no notice of what we asked for—a very strong framework that would stop contamination from one farm to another. That was not done, and we now know—it has been well publicised—what happened.

That the case went through the court system was unfortunate for Mr Marsh. He has lived in that area all his life, his family was there previous to that, and had many friends. He found out what true friends are about during this case, which cost him around \$800 000 in legal fees—something that should never, ever have happened. It should have been dealt with in this place. This government is now saying, “Let’s take all the rules out—all of them—and leave it under the auspices of the Australian government.” In regard to the Australian government, the Premier bleats about Western Australia’s GST share, but the federal government will not listen. We say the federal government should not interfere in many other areas. We say, “Oh, the federal government has forgotten Western Australia”, and that is exactly what will happen here. We will be on the end of the stick.

Talking about farming, let us have a quick look at the state of the milk industry. The federal government provided payments to farmers on the east coast, but did it remember the west coast? No. It will be exactly the same for the grain industry. If there is a problem, the federal government will just wipe us off—“Oh no, that’s Western Australia”; we are on the other side of the world insofar as many federal politicians are concerned. I certainly do not see much advocacy from our existing Liberal members of federal Parliament. In fact, there is one case of us being highlighted to the Australian government—it was when the Whip lost control. That was about the only time we had a mention from the Australian government. It was when the Liberal Party Whip turned a blind eye to a couple of people running out the door, and a debacle ensued. In fact, the Liberal members cannot even run their own show. I saw that yesterday the federal government voted for an opposition motion because it did not understand the process. That is the type of government we have, and that Australian government will be the overseer of the grain industry in Western Australia. It is deplorable that we think the federal government has enough form and empathy to think it can help Western Australia. I do not see it, and that is why I do not think we should support this bill. I do not think we should cede our powers to another group that does not have much knowledge or understanding of the Western Australian grain industry. We have seen what has happened to the grain industry over time—a farmer has bought out the neighbour and the neighbour has bought out the neighbour, and there are huge tracts of land with no fences or barriers to signify where it should or should not stop. People say to me, “What would you know about it?” I know that people should have the right to say yes or no. This bill takes away those rights for people to say that they do not want contamination on their property. It may give people the right to grow it, but it does not give any rights to the person next door who does not want contamination. We are seeing those rights being taken away.

Instead of just sitting in my office in the south west, I went up to one of the larger farms in Wongan Hills and had a look at how they go about their seeding. There is massive machinery, equalled only by the machinery in the mining industry in Western Australia. There are 30-metre spreads on the air seeders, which can put two types of seed in the one furrow at the same time, so that when the crop is cut for hay, the hay is mixed already instead of it having to be separately mixed. Machinery like that is absolutely amazing. A lot of people in this place would not realise how large that machinery is. Farmers have picked up on technology very quickly, as usual. They use GPS systems, so the driver of the machine is only a jockey; he sits there and watches the screen and all the rest is done through the GPS system, although I think they have to turn the machine around at the far end of the run and bring it back. I went for a ride in one. Although it was all new to me, I think it would drive a person crazy to drive around a paddock, hour after hour, for 16 hours. The farmer told me that he had to get in some outside labour. I asked him why that was and whether there was any in the local area. He said that they do not like what he pays and they do not like working 16 hours a day. I said, “Oh, that’s strange!” Sixteen hours a day is enough for anyone to sit in one of those machines. But, again, the technology is really good and I believe it enhances our industry. As regulators, we should be working towards making sure that it is a fair system.

I have not seen one poll asking those in the farming community whether they want genetically modified crops in their area or even in the state. I think it is incumbent on the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA and the Western Australian Farmers Federation to do a poll to get direction from all farmers, not just one group of farmers. On the opposite side, anti-GM farmers representing 115 farms came down from the midwest. This is no small issue for the people who oppose GM crops. It is a divisive issue. It is an issue that could be managed under the system we have now.

I was going to say that it was quite enlightening, but that is not the right word; I am lost for words to explain how I felt when the press turned around a comment that I made—I should have known better—and claimed that the position of the Labor Party had changed. I made a comment that we understand that GM canola is in the ground

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and would be very hard to remove in the short term and, in fact, in the long term. The seed is already there. Of course, it will self-propagate if it has been spilt on the side of the road. It could have been left in a bag in a shed. We could not say that on 5 December 2017, there will be no GM in WA, because people will have crops in the ground or seed in their sheds or seed will have been spilt along the roadway, and that has certainly been tested and proven. ABC radio reported that Mick Murray said that the Labor Party's position had changed. That is not the case. It was misreported. It was used to further people's views about GM crops.

Of course, we also have Mr Colin Bettles, the most pro-GM person I have ever seen. I saw a *Meet the Press* show on television and guess who was in the front row? Mr Bettles. He has pushed this issue in the press and has been very pro-GM. In fact, I invited him down for lunch. This is quite a funny story. He was terrified to be seen with me. If he could have worn one of those clown masks and walked through Parliament, he would have been far happier, because he did not want to be seen with me.

**Mr J.M. Francis:** I used that yesterday, so you can't use it.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** He would have worn a mask, if I can put it that way. He did not want to be seen with me; he was looking over his shoulder.

There was a pro-GM speaker on the *Meet the Press* show who spoke to all the politicians and the press in Canberra, which is where Mr Bettles has moved to. He was so excited that I thought he was going to wet himself. Guess what happened then? As soon as the speaker finished, who asked the dorothy dixer? It was Colin Bettles. We can see that the GM issue has been pushed through the press by certain people. I believe people have an obligation to put both sides of the story, which has not happened in much of the press in country areas. That saddens me, because a good reporter will always give both sides of the story, which Colin Bettles has never done; he has just been pro-GM and poked and prodded and tried to push me through hoops so that I would break it down.

The Labor Party's position on this issue has always been strong. There are issues that have to be dealt with, even under this legislation. It is just not on to have open slather. It is very demeaning in some ways to the people who do not want GM contamination on their properties. If people say to their neighbours that they do not want GM contamination on their property and ask them not to seed a dividing paddock, the farmer who wants to grow it may have to have an argument with his neighbour, which we do not want to see. We do not want to see what happened in the Marsh case. There was crowd funding and a very large sum of personal money for Mr Marsh to pay for lawyers, but if we dig down a bit deeper to see who underwrote the Baxter case, we will find that there were some companies that have a very big interest in the issue of GM seeding. Some of our grain-growing areas and breeding areas were sold out by this government when 19 per cent of InterGrain Pty Ltd was sold. For a very small sum—I think it was around the \$19 million or \$20 million mark—a company got all the intellectual rights to the breeding programs that had been going on in Western Australia. It got not only the GM rights, but also all other rights. It was a very cheap buy. But now that company has been in trouble and has been attacked worldwide by many and various groups because of the way it has done its business and it is now walking away from the industry. It is selling a fair share to Bayer. Is Bayer above board? I hope so. I would not criticise it because I have nothing to show that it is not above board. Certainly, Monsanto has not been what I would call squeaky clean in many of its dealing. It has put pressure on farmers and lobby groups. It has run it through the courts because it has the ability to do that. It supported people on contamination issues when it should have kept its nose out of it. There was a trickle-down effect in the support for the Baxter side of that court case. Big companies are playing Big Brother. That is something that I absolutely detest.

We need to look at who is running the Western Australian government when it comes to the farming community. It is not the Minister for Agriculture and Food. It is also not the Department of Agriculture and Food. The department has been gutted. It now has about half the number of staff that it had previously. Those remaining staff are working very hard to keep their heads above water. The people who are running agriculture in this state are the two major farming lobby groups. Do those groups represent everyone in the agricultural industry? No, they do not. We need to keep that in mind. Not every farmer is a member of one or other of those groups.

I find it very humorous that these lobby groups have forgotten one of the basic rules. That is that we are not allowed to discriminate on the basis of age. Mr Seabrook from the Pastoralists and Graziers Association had great fun in saying that I was too old to do my job. I thought that was hilarious.

**Mrs G.J. Godfrey:** No way, member!

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Don't worry about that! We should never forget the old saying—if a dog can still bark, it can still bite! The other night, Mr Seabrook was kind enough to come to me and say, "I might have overstepped the mark. I was under pressure at the time. I might have been misquoted." He was there with his lovely wife, and we had a good talk about it. However, that does not take away the thought process behind that comment.

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Mr Seabrook also tried to bully Mr Redman, the then Minister for Lands, into signing some documents that would have changed the rangelands. I take my hat off to Mr Redman, because he told Mr Seabrook to mind his own business and said, “I’m the minister in this area; if you don’t like it, lump it.” After the minister said that—not in exactly those words, of course—Mr Seabrook was very public in saying, “Come back, Mr Redman. I didn’t mean to upset you. Can we do it again?” There was certainly some laughter in my house when I read that in the *Countryman*. As I have said, I take my hat off to the former minister, because he stood up to a lobby group that was trying to bully him. That is something that we must all stand up to. We know that the political alliance of the PGA is not exactly to the National Party; in fact, it is a long way from the National Party. However, the PGA will not get anywhere if it tries to belittle and bully ministers into the future. It does not matter whether it is a Labor, Liberal or National Party minister. I do not think that is the way to go about business.

I have understood the PGA’s position right from day one. The PGA came to speak to me about GM and asked me to consider the issue. I have considered it, and I still believe we have a problem with how we segregate, and with how we are viewed on the worldwide stage. What I mean by the “worldwide stage” is that many countries are now starting to ban GM foods. Surprisingly, some of the poorer countries in the world are the leaders in banning GM foods. I am not talking about GM canola now. I am talking about things such as eggplant and other foods that are part of the staple diet of people in those countries. We would think that if people in those countries thought GM foods were good, they would grab the opportunity to get them.

There has been a major pushback against GM foods. Even in Western Australia, the buying of GM seed has dropped dramatically from the first turnout that was put on the table. Farmers are starting to vote in a different way by not buying the seed. I believe that is more about economics than their position on GM or non-GM. They believe it is not profitable to grow GM crops. The minister’s second reading speech contains some figures to show that it is profitable. Farmers, being farmers, count every cent and every dollar along the way. If they do not think something will be economically viable for them, they will walk away from it. I do not think that the huge gains that have been claimed in the minister’s second reading speech are totally right and across the board, because if that scenario was right, farmers would grab that opportunity. There is an amazing statistic in the second reading speech that GM has increased farmer profits by 68 per cent. That is unbelievable, to be honest. If that was the case, every farmer in Western Australia would be growing GM crops. However, that is not the case.

There are many issues with GM crops. The main issue for me is that if we are to take any notice of the lobby groups, they should have had a poll or a vote on this issue out in the paddock. They should be able to say that they have surveyed every farmer in Western Australia, and here is the result. However, they are not game to do that. That is because, in my view, the result will come back in the negative. Many people are saying that they do not want GM, or they are not sure about it at this stage, and we should leave the existing rules in place. We have seen what has happened over time with GM canola—which was believed to be acceptable.

I went to Mt Barker and met with a group from WAFarmers. I was lobbied very hard and was told that I should take a leadership role. I believe I have done that. Even at that meeting, it was not 100 per cent pro-GM. Some of the people at that meeting did not want GM crops. We met at a hall near the river between Muradup and—the member for Wagin might know where it is —

**Mr T.K. Waldron:** Muradup hall?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** No. It is down further. It is between Kojonup and Muradup.

**Mr T.K. Waldron:** Changerup.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Yes, that is right. I had an on-the-back-of-a-truck meeting with the farmers there. One group was on one truck, and the other group was on another truck. It was not a coming together of the clans to tell me what they wanted. There were two different groups there.

One of the biggest growth areas now is organic foods. As people in some of the developing countries become more financial, they are becoming more picky and fastidious about the food that they buy. Organic foods are high on the list. One of the most forward-thinking countries when it comes to organic foods is Japan. I have been to Japan a couple of times. My daughter lived there for a couple of years. It is unbelievable how people in Japan go about selecting their food. They read the labels—which I do not think Aussies do too often—to make sure that what they are eating is healthy. A few years ago, the Premier said that he had some concerns about GM foods and the Japanese market. We know that we can never get speech notes from the Premier —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** That’s because I don’t have them.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I know. We can never get them. That is what I am saying.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** They don’t exist.

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**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I agree with the Premier for a change!

The Premier mentioned at a gathering at, I think, the WAFarmers annual general meeting that we need to be aware and careful about what we do with GM foods because we could ruin our very strong market with the Japanese. That is still the same; nothing has changed. By doing this without any rules in place we could ruin that market. One bad move and we could write off millions of dollars because of this small group pushing along this line.

It is amazing the lengths the Japanese go to when choosing what they buy and eat. That brings me to the marketing side of genetically modified foods. Some food products have a list of ingredients that state they contain GM foods. Some people do not care and they will shop for the cheapest price, but there is another growth area, as I have said, in organic and non-GM foods. There is a major market in that and a move towards that. The biggest growth area in Walmart in America is in organic foods. Thinking about that, it is quite an amazing movement and it is able to be measured.

**Mr D.T. Redman:** Industry over there is authorised to grow a whole range of GM crops, but there has been a significant growth of organic food.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The member is dead right, but it shows that people are also moving away from GM because they are selecting at a consumer point. That is the point I make.

**Mr D.T. Redman:** Yes, there is a market opportunity, but the point is that the growing of GM crops is certainly not prohibiting that market opportunity.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** No, but that will push back into the farming area and farmers will get a premium for non-GM crops. That is what I am pointing out.

**Mr D.T. Redman:** Absolutely, and they can, so the point is that coexistence can occur and they can still reap those benefits.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I do not believe coexistence can occur because —

**Mr D.T. Redman:** You just said that the biggest growth of organic food is in America and they have been growing GM crops for many, many years. That seems to be in conflict with your argument here.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Who said where that organic food came from? I did not say where it came from. Some of it is imported and some of it may be imported from Western Australia until this bill goes through. We do not know. I am pointing out that this is a growth area that we could be stifling with this bill. We could be making one of the biggest mistakes in farming history. Turning back the clock will not happen, because, as I have said previously, one seed, 10 seeds or two bags of seeds left behind in the shed could contaminate anyone's crop. People argue with me and tell me that contamination will not happen—that they will put windrows in and do this and do that. But I do not think anyone here would not have seen a willy-willy that could lift not just a handful of seeds, but a shed and shift it 50 metres—let alone a handful of seeds. Anyone who has lived in the country would have seen sheets of iron or rubbish bags tearing across a paddock in a willy-willy—anything like that. Some of those willy-willies are very, very strong. There are not just the little pipe willy-willies that collapse, which we used to chase as kids to try to get in the middle of. There are willy-willies that will knock a shed over. I have even seen one knock a standard crane over. Imagine what could happen if such a willy-willy went through a field of GM crop—I will not say what is in the field—and lobbed it two, three or maybe five kilometres away. Then there is the problem of contamination from one field to another, and there are no rules about that. The member for Warren–Blackwood was not in the chamber when I mentioned this, but we asked him as minister to put rules in place to stop the Marsh–Baxter case and he did not do that. We have seen what happened. In *Hansard* there is record of the former minister saying that it would never happen.

**Mr D.T. Redman:** That was managed under the current civil law.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** That is right, but the member for Warren–Blackwood said that farmer would not go against farmer. He said negotiations would happen across the fence. Across the fence is not through the High Court.

**Mr D.T. Redman:** You can coexist, but from time to time there are litigation actions between farmers.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** We always knew that contamination was going to happen and the member for Warren–Blackwood knew that himself. We asked him to put in rules so it would not happen, but it did. We know what happened out of that situation because of a slack government—a government that did not take the next step to make sure there would not be those problems.

I have just got a bit sidelined, but I will go back to consumers. One of the things I notice as I get a bit older with the grandkids coming on is that a lot of things come out of a packet. Whereas before someone's mum or wife would make something, they now buy it in a packet. But people are being very selective about what they buy in supermarkets and they check whether it is labelled. I believe that the labelling of GM products should be far

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more legible. It should be far easier to pick up a product and see that it contains a GM product, in the same way that we can see that something contains peanuts or other things, so people can make that informed choice. There is an argument that the traits of GM canola when it is turned to oil are minimal and the industry has asked to bring the allowable amount in a product to, I think, 0.9 per cent—I could be corrected. I do not think that will stand the test of time, because it still means there is a GM ingredient in that product. Do not forget that over 40 000 years or more our human bodies have been conditioned to digest certain foods. There are all those scientific areas that point to the fact that if foods are changed too dramatically, it can change the way the body accepts or rejects those foods. One only wonders then about the amount of people who now get allergies. Have we moved too far and have we gone too far out of the circle of what the human body is used to? I do not know; I just bring it up as an issue that we have to think about in the future. If we keep moving and moving, we might find out we have a problem with our DNA make-up and we are accepting or rejecting some of the GM crossbreeding of plants. In the future it might apply to animals, and I am not too sure about that. We have to be very, very careful, not only in the farming area, but also —

[Interruption.]

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Who did that?

**Mr B.J. Grylls:** Are you getting a farmer to call now?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** It was 6PR! Talk about changing your train of thought!

I will get back online. Do we know about those things? We do not. In my view the research has been very shallow and very short from the time these GM traits have been introduced. Many people say that traditional crossbreeding is still far superior. We see changes. It is very sad that in what has been an excellent season for wheat growers, frost has taken its toll in some of those areas and really, really knocked them about. Why? I can be corrected, but a farmer was telling me that because there has been such a change in the dynamics of how wheat is grown, there is a shorter and denser period of growth, which does not allow for air to get through and for the crop to get strong enough to stand up to frost. It works if everything is perfect, and it is probably the same for other areas, but if everything is not perfect and something is missing, we will suffer. We will suffer through our pockets, through our health and through the viability of farming areas. It is with great caution that I ask the government to put in some rules to make sure we do not have another court case such as *Marsh v Baxter*. The results of that court case would have been quite different if it had been canola to canola, but because it was just GM canola into a paddock of wheat, there was a bit of a different spin on it.

I am very, very concerned that we do not have any rules. How can we have rules and stability in the farming industry when we look at the turnover of agriculture ministers? We have had Redman, Baston, Nalder and now Lewis over the last four years; in four years we have had four different ministers, so who has passed this on? It was quite obvious, when we were briefed, what the department's position is. The people who briefed us were very strongly on the GM side. Let us look at the successive ministers' speeches. Talk about plagiarism! They have all read from the same sheet—not one different word in their speeches. It is a bit like history that has been handed down; maybe they got a copy of the GM bible, because each speech in this Parliament, upper or lower house, has been the same. There is no new evidence, no new thoughts, and I guess today we will get another speech that is the same. It would be very interesting to line them all up. We have seen what happens on the Liberal side when members have speeches written for them that plagiarise many other sources. Even Brian Burke had a go on the Liberal side! The minister can frown, but he should go back and check history and he will find out that Brian Burke had a say in some of the speeches from the Liberal side. Do I know him? Of course I know him. I know Brian Burke very well, and I have no problem with that, but I did not use any of his speeches. If he walked in today, I would say, "How are you going, Brian?" because I have known him for over 40 years. Even if I were out on the main street of Perth and the Premier walked up to me, I would say, "G'day, Premier—Mr Barnett. How are you?" But I do not say it to him in Collie very often because he does not come down there.

In saying that, the issue is that there has been no change in attitude and no research done within this house. People have not gone out and met with groups; they have only listened to lobby groups and are now pushing the lobby groups' points. In letters to the editor in *The West Australian* there has been a very strong push from people with concerns about GM food. Going back to two elections ago it was already a major issue. In fact, the front page of an issue of the *Geraldton Guardian* carried a headline about the National Party opposing the introduction of GM crops. That was on the front page, but we know that National Party members are fair-weather sailors. The party probably received a donation somewhere along the line and decided to change its position, but that is where it was, on the front page of the *Geraldton Guardian*; members can dig it out.

**Mr D.T. Redman** interjected.

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**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The minister has never been lobbied?

**Mr D.T. Redman** interjected.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** No, I have not.

**Mr D.T. Redman** interjected.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** No, I did not say that at all. The minister was not in the house when I explained that position. He comes in halfway through, as usual, underprepared, wanting just to have a crack in behind. Let us face it: I have never been to a country town where they have thrown a length of rope over a rail and said, “Bring the minister out! We want to put him in the noose!” I have never had that, but the minister has. They have wanted to string him up! I do not agree with that; I do not think he is a bad sort of bloke! But, honestly, they would have strung him up down there, and he knows that very well. I have seen him stand up against the Premier and against others, but he should not come in here halfway through something that has already been explained and start rabbling on about what he has not heard. I think that is exactly where he is in his own electorate. I have been to Donnybrook in recent times and they did not even know who he was.

**Mr D.T. Redman** interjected.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** No, I am not listening to the minister. I will talk through the Chair. As I said, I have not had a length of rope with a noose thrown over a rail and had people say, “We want to put him in there.”

**Mr D.T. Redman** interjected.

**THE ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker):** Minister, that is not appropriate. Would you please not interject. Hansard will be struggling to record what is being debated. Thank you.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Certainly, I have copped my share of abuse, but no-one has gone that far. As I said, it has been said by someone from the Pastoralists and Graziers Association that I am too old, and the person who said it is about two years younger than I, so I do not know how that fits; Mr Seabrook is not much younger than I. When they say I am too old, I say to them, “You’d better talk to the Premier. We’re the same age.” Maybe we should be going out on the same note, Premier, and maybe we will. On 11 March we will find out!

In saying that, this is a very, very serious issue for the farming industry. To take away all rules and replace them with none and to cede power to the commonwealth government is something I just cannot understand whatsoever. We have seen in here time and again what happens if we allow things to move away from our control. I think it is very, very foolish for this government to fall in line with a lobby group that does not have the full support of the farming industry. Maybe it would be more acceptable to farming groups—I am not saying to the Labor Party—if we could support GM and non-GM areas. Maybe that could have been done, but to have nothing in place is one of the worst things I have seen.

There is also the issue of who cleans up along the roadside. Whose responsibility is it to clean up plants or stamens along the roadside when there are tests for GM material? Whose job is it? I do not know, because there are no rules around it. People come back and say, “Well, you’d better get the farmers to do it.” Okay; that is another cost to the farmer who does not want GM on his property because seed has fallen out of a truck next to his GM crop and could be cross-fertilised. Rules about this should have been put in the bill. Taking tailgates from trucks, which was one of the things that had to be done at the start, has not been done. There are still sprinklings along the road. All the issues that could have been and should have been addressed in this bill have been deleted—all of them. Where do we go? I think we are going down a path on which we will see more court cases and more people arguing across the fence because of the difference in price. At the moment, canola is the main one. We will see those sorts of things become more prevalent because there are no rules in Western Australia.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** Member, you say “rules”. What rules are you talking about?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** About contamination.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** Have you got amendments to the bill?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** No, there cannot be amendments to the bill; it is wiping the bill out. Sorry about the member’s ignorance, but this is wiping the bill out and we cannot have amendments if we do not have a bill. Does the member understand that? Oh, that is right—he is from the National Party; I forgot about that. Everything we taught him on this side, he forgot when he went over to that side.

The point I am really making is that there is nothing in this bill that gives any confidence to the non-GM grower—nothing whatsoever. It is a really big hole in the whole system. If it were a normal bill, we could put something into it to say that growers must take care about where their rotations are because of a dividing fence or that there is a step back, but there is nothing. There is also the difference in price. Of course, it varies. As

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I have said, there is a difference of \$30 to \$50 a tonne. Some of the farmers are saying, “Okay, I don’t want to use all those extra sprays because the plant is tolerant to some of those sprays. I want to do it my way, but I won’t be allowed to because when I want to spray the weeds, I will have to knock my plants over.” It is not as simple as just saying, yes, we will allow genetically modified crops. There is a lot of science about how farmers grow, where they grow and what they grow. It is a great sadness in many ways. I do not want to be coming back during the next term of Parliament, if we win, and bringing in another bill to pick that up. That is what will happen. We will have to pick up contamination and the cross breeding of different plants. If there is cross breeding between canola and some of the radishes that are prevalent weeds across our state, I do not want to have to come back in here and say, “That’s a job. That’s what you’ll have to do and there will be fines for it.” This bill had the chance to do that and it did not, because it is just wiping out the complete act. There are so many variations in here that just by wiping out an act, it leaves farmers open to litigation, crops open to contamination, and farmers open to a loss of earnings, which I believe would also come under a litigation area.

Let us go right back to the start and say that it is very strange to think that after three ministers—Redman, Baston and Nalder, and now we have a Mr Lewis—that finally, in the last weeks of Parliament, we have this bill come in here. The bill could have been brought in a lot earlier and discussed properly, but it has not. It has been pushed in in the last bit. Read the *Countryman*—the Pastoralists and Graziers Association has been saying, “We will get it in. We will push it in. We want to know where it is.” Each agriculture minister has come under extreme pressure from those lobby groups, which have not surveyed every farm in Western Australia. That is something that saddens me, because I believe it is not a true representation of the industry itself. That is where I see it.

I will be very quick on this last part about biosecurity. I think there is a bill coming in on biosecurity as well, over and above this bill—it is not just a change to the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 that is tied up in this repeal bill. This government has one of the worst records on biosecurity. I remember being surprised at the excitement of the Minister for Agriculture and Food and Leader of the National Party at the time, who came in here with bags of rice and threw them all around—everyone got a bag of rice. What happened to the rice? Biosecurity failed. Rice blast was introduced into the Ord River, which took away our advantage of having clean, green rice. It took away that advantage. Because of what needs to be done to mitigate rice blast, the rice industry disappeared. I have still got my bag of rice at home; I would not eat it because I was a bit worried about what it had in it. What happened to the joy and glee of the minister and Leader of the National Party at the time? All the money that had been spent up there was ruined because biosecurity was not observed. I do not suppose there is any evidence, but it is thought that the rice blast was brought into the Ord on the bags that had the seed in, but I do not think there was any major study into that—they just said it was another failure and another \$170 million and that they do not worry about it too much on that side of the house.

Biosecurity is another side that has me concerned under this government. We have taken the easy way out. While it has not been done yet, there has been talk of declared weeds being removed from the list because they are too hard to deal with. The government has not done enough work in that area. That is something, again, that the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the Minister for Lands should be working very hard on and not just walking away from. To be changing the biosecurity legislation at the same time is fraught with danger, because, again, we could be causing some problems with where we sell our products into other countries, because they might not take it. We have seen it happen in the beef industry over time. That was not a biosecurity issue, but different contaminants were in frozen beef and it was rejected and sent back because the contamination went above what other countries thought was acceptable.

In my last minute I make it very clear—the minister has gone again when I want to speak to him!—that the Labor Party still opposes this bill very strongly, but it also understands that if we had left the act in place and changed it and repealed the legislation for canola, we could not stop it in a day—it is not a vehicle that we could go out and put the brakes on on the day we had finished.

**MR I.C. BLAYNEY (Geraldton)** [11.06 am]: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill 2015. I will state from the start that I was a farmer for 25 years and I remain a member of the Western Australian Farmers Federation. I never grew a genetically modified crop, but I did spend three and a half years as a research funder. I note that the GM technology we are talking about has been in place for quite some time under both major parties in New South Wales and Victoria.

Several decades ago, plant breeding started to switch away from what we call conventional breeding and towards the adoption of the various technologies that make up what we call GM technology. In fact, 2015 was the twentieth anniversary of the first commercialisation of biotech crops. Since 1996, some 1.8 billion hectares of biotech crops have been grown—that is roughly the equivalent of 80 per cent of the surface area of the United States or China. In 2014, they were grown across 181 million hectares in some 28 countries by some 18 million farmers, and 90 per cent of those farmers were small farmers. In China, 7.1 million small farmers grow them, and in India, 7.7 million farmers grow biotech cotton because of its benefits. In the Philippines, some 415 000 small farmers

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grow GM maize. The five biggest countries adopting GM crops are the US, Brazil, Argentina, India and Canada. From this point onwards, if a farmer decides they are going to rely on the old breeding technologies, they will fall behind their competitors because they will be quicker to adopt desirable traits.

The technology is of particular use when a plant characteristic is controlled by a single gene. It is quite useful if it involves a small number of genes, but of course it becomes more difficult if a trait relies on a large number of genes. The technology allows a cross to be made. If it is known that a plant characteristic is influenced by a single gene, all the progeny of that cross can be screened to find out straightaway if that gene is in the progeny. That collapses the breeding time from seven years to three. That is the real advantage of this technology. If there is an epidemic of a specific pest or disease with a single gene—the classic case used is the potato blight famine in Ireland—it can be identified straightaway and a resistant gene can be put into the species, which collapses the time it takes to address a particular problem that quickly arises.

Global studies have shown that over the last 20 years, genetically modified crops have resulted in a 37 per cent reduction of pesticide use; indeed, between 1996 and 2012, 500 000 million kilos less active ingredients were used. GM crops increase crop yields by 22 per cent and increase farmer profits by 68 per cent. In 2013, the use of GM crops reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 28 billion kilograms, which is equivalent to taking 12.4 million cars off the road for one year.

I will address the issue of safety. Much is made of the supposed dangers of adopting a GM breeding system. At its most basic, the desirable gene is found and is taken out of the plant and placed into a plant of the same species. In fact, the only new thing is the small piece of DNA that is used to splice it into the recipient's DNA. It is actually the small piece of DNA that enables us to identify a plant as a GM crop, because it shows up when it is screened. Conventional breeding involves the transfer of many genes and having to select the few plants that contain the desirable characteristic. I have not heard a single example of someone consuming a GM product and of becoming even slightly ill. Some years ago, 60 per cent of products in supermarkets contained a GM product.

When anyone quotes supposed research on the dangers of GM crops, which is usually gathered from the internet, they must ask themselves two questions. First, has it been correctly published in a reputable scientific publication; and second, has it been replicated by another researcher? If the answer to either question is no, the research is probably not worth looking at. Our understanding of this technology in Australia is state of the art because of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator. We can be totally confident in its work and science.

One of the big benefits that come from growing GM crops is the environmental benefit. The ultimate irony, of course, is that those most strongly opposed to the growing of GM crops are frequently those who are most in favour of preserving the environment. The benefits that accrue include less fuel being used because of less tillage; more carbon retained in the soil because of less tillage; the use of fewer pesticides; and less fertiliser run-off. One of the areas that GM technology is moving into is adapting plants so that they are more efficient in taking up nitrogen, which means less nitrogen going into the groundwater and atmosphere. However, the world has to address a number of issues that revolve around the issue of climate change, such as an increase in the average temperature; a change in the amount of rainfall and rainfall patterns; a rising concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> and the effects that has on the ozone layer; changes in the frequency of drought, heatwaves, floods and hurricanes; the emergence of new pests and diseases; and, of course, the world faces the other problem of an increasing world population. Indeed by 2050, the world will have to feed nine billion people. Less efficient, higher protein diets are being adopted in China and India due to an increase in incomes.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz):** Members, just keep your conversations hushed.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Golden rice addresses vitamin A deficiency which, in the Third World, results in the blindness of about one million children a year. That problem is basically fixed by putting beta carotene into rice plants. I think the first commercial crops will be in the Philippines this year. Plants can have multiple resistances to address different pests and diseases and tolerance to herbicides. Quite critical for Australia's future, we can also put in drought tolerance. Traits can be stacked so we can literally select the particular traits we want in the plant that we are growing to address a problem. We have to accept that there will be more severe droughts in the future. The climate is changing and members should remember that agriculture uses 70 per cent of the world's available fresh water, which is another area we have to focus on. We must reduce the amount of fresh water that is being used.

The next generation of biotech crops will include crops of apple, banana, cassava, citrus, chickpea, groundnuts, mustard, pigeon peas, potato, rice, safflower, sugarcane and maybe wheat. GM wheat is currently not grown anywhere in the world. I point out that many of these crops are staples in poorer countries but are not grown in rich countries.

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Earlier this year, I visited the agriculture centre at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Israel. Interestingly, one of the areas that it is doing a lot of research on has come about as the world's recycling of fresh water increases. It is looking at what products are in the recycled water that come from medical and recreational drugs, how that will go into crops and the effect that that food will have, especially on unborn children. I put it to members here that the effects of drugs in recycled water are more severe than the effect of GM crops.

**Mr M.P. Murray:** So you admit there will be some effect.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** No, not at all.

**Mr M.P. Murray:** You just said that.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** No, I just said that the drugs in recycled water will probably have an effect on people, but there will be no effect from GM crops. If we want to do research because we are concerned about human health, that is the area to look at.

Finally, I will quote Norman Borlaug, who members probably have not heard of. One member is nodding his head. Norman Borlaug saved one billion people from hunger and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for the impact his semi-dwarf wheat technology had on the alleviation of hunger. The following is a memorable and historical self-explanatory quote from the man who knew more about feeding the world than anyone else because he achieved it with the green revolution. Borlaug said —

Over the past decade, we have been witnessing the success of plant biotechnology. This technology is helping farmers throughout the world produce higher yield, while reducing pesticide use and soil erosion. The benefits and safety of biotechnology has been proven over the past decade in countries with more than half of the world's population. What we need is courage by the leaders of those countries where farmers still have no choice but to use older and less effective methods. The Green Revolution and now plant biotechnology are helping meet the growing demand for food production, while preserving our environment for future generations.

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro)** [11.18 am]: I am not that pleased to be speaking on the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill 2015 because I think it is a retrograde move.

**Mr J.H.D. Day:** No-one is forcing you to speak.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Leader of the House, I will still speak for 30 minutes—do not worry about that!

**Mr J.H.D. Day** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I promise the Leader of the House that I will speak for 30 minutes and that I will ask a significant number of questions during consideration in detail. I promise him that.

At the outset, I extend thanks for the vote of confidence to the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and the Western Australian Farmers Federation, because the only reason that this bill has been rushed into the house with such urgency after eight long years of a haphazard and mismanaged Barnett government is that the PGA and the Western Australian Farmers Federation fear the likely event that the Liberal and National Parties will lose the next election. That is obviously their view because they have committed to pushing the government to withdraw the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act from the people of Western Australia. There has been no urgency for eight years, but now, five months before the election and in the last dying weeks of the Barnett government, it is suddenly urgent to repeal the act. Clearly, the Western Australian Farmers Federation and, probably most vocally, the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA, which seems most emphatic about the need to bring on the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill 2015, fear that in the event that Western Australian Labor wins the next election, which they anticipate will happen, they will not be able to get the repeal bill through Parliament—so this bill is now urgent. In the dying days of the Barnett government this bill has become urgent because the Pastoralists and Graziers Association thinks that WA Labor will win the election. I thank it for that vote of confidence. It is a hard task and there is still a long way to go. No-one knows what happens in the political process.

**Mr F.A. Alban** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No-one could predict much about the next election beyond the certainty that the member for Swan Hills is going to lose his seat.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz):** Members!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** There is no way that the member for Swan Hills will survive the wrath of the people of Ellenbrook after they have been lied to and abused —

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**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr N.W. Morton** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members! I am on my feet! Member for Forrestfield, I call you for the first time. I am on my feet. The member for Warnbro has the call, thank you.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** As I said, no-one can predict anything with certainty about the next state election with the exception of the seat of Swan Hills. I know —

**Mr F.A. Alban:** You are such a big hero!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member should not have interjected on me. I know that the people of Ellenbrook have a long memory. They will not buy one more time the rubbish that the member for Swan Hills has been peddling to them for two terms of government. If there is one certainty, it is that.

**Mr F.A. Alban** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Swan Hills!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I would like to go to Sportsbet the moment it opens its book on individual seats. I would like to bet on the member's seat and if it is anything above \$1, I reckon it is a good bet.

**Mr F.A. Alban** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** You are gone. If you stay quiet, I will not keep talking about it.

**Mr F.A. Alban** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Swan Hills, I am warning you. I will need to call you if you persist.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Mr Acting Speaker, you would have called me three times by now.

I have points to make about the genetically modified crops debate and the lack of argument provided for repealing this bill, particularly in the second reading speech. This is probably the most flimsy second reading speech for any bill that I have heard in my time in Parliament. I do not hold the minister to account for that because he just represents the very flimsy and weak minister in the other place responsible for this process. There is no justification. We heard the member for Geraldton regurgitate the claims in his contribution. He read out much of the second reading speech about the amount of GM crop growth around the world and claims about returns and savings and the like. However, I want to focus on about five points.

The first is that GM crops and food is entirely about intellectual property rights; there is nothing else to it. If we look at the focus of the big multinationals that involve themselves in this activity, it is not about feeding the world, growing crops in dry areas or developing new technologies; it is solely about owning the intellectual property rights. Once a company owns intellectual property rights to a crop and it convinces farmers with an enticing argument that they should engage in its services to provide them with a crop, the farmers are completely beholden to that company. That company owns the farmer. A farmer who buys their crop from a GM provider cedes their ability to retain their own seed, and, as a consequence, becomes reliant upon the company that owns the intellectual property rights for future provision of seed. That is a significant thing. As a natural consequence of having engaged the services of the company and chosen to pursue the path of growing that genetically modified seed, that farmer is then reliant upon the company to advise on what process they should employ to get the best results from that seed. We know that in Western Australia the only genetically modified crop that is grown commercially is Roundup Ready canola. The only benefit that that canola provides to the grower is its capacity to absorb greater quantities of glyphosate without dying than non-GM canola. The advice to farmers is that it will benefit them because they will be able to manage their weeds more effectively; they will be able to plant GM seed and spray more glyphosate, the weeds will be kept down and the GM canola will survive. There is no benefit for dryland farming or for the protection against diseases for the consumer. There are none of the benefits alluded to by the member for Geraldton. There are none of the benefits that GM crops will ultimately provide as advocated by GM proponents because that is not what farmers get when growing GM canola in Western Australia. The sole benefit is the capacity to grow a plant that will absorb more herbicide than a non-GM plant—that is it, and you know what? That is a questionable benefit. We have to look at more than just the particular argument that it will keep the weeds down. What happens if, as has occurred in other places around the world with other types of modifications, the weeds develop a resistance to glyphosate? A farmer might have compelled themselves to pursue the path of growing GM canola that has the benefit of being able to absorb more glyphosate and must be bought off the same supplier that sells the seed. What happens if the weed that that farmer is trying to defeat develops a resistance, which nature is pretty good at doing without the assistance of scientists? When a farmer starts to buy his seed from a sole supplier that owns the intellectual property rights and has, by necessity, because it owns the intellectual property rights to the products that it has

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developed, a less diverse range of offerings, that farmer diminishes the diversity of products available to him. A farmer expands the vulnerability of his farming activities to modifications that happen in nature such as resistance to herbicides. I cannot for the life of me understand why people engaged in an activity like farming, which is frequently so tenuous and takes a great deal of courage and resistance and relies, to some extent, on a degree of luck, would open themselves up to a vulnerability by reducing and diminishing the diversity of the crops available to combat things like resistance to herbicide. That is my question. I ask that question of the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and the Western Australia Farmers Federation through *Hansard* because I am not convinced that they have thought about it.

The second point I want to talk about is competitive advantage and the sacrifice thereof. We heard from the member for Geraldton about all the countries that are now growing genetically modified crops. Interestingly, a large number of them are our direct competitors. This thought process being pursued by the government, the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and, unfortunately, even members of the Western Australian Farmers Federation who feel they have to get on the bandwagon, blows my mind. Why sacrifice competitive advantage to competitors? Until recently, we in Western Australia were growing non-GM crops. Today, non-GM canola carries a premium of \$40 a tonne. It has been as high as \$70 a tonne, and it fluctuates, but it does not go down below zero. Markets around the world, where we are trying to compete and sell our product, place a premium on the non-GM product. That is not something that is made up by the anti-GM lobby; it is just a fact. I have great admiration for farmers; I have many of them in my family. I have absolute respect for what they do, because it is a tough game, but I cannot for the life of me understand why people would voluntarily, in a competitive business, sacrifice a competitive advantage, in this case \$40 a tonne. To what end? To benefit their competitors, who will be rubbing their hands with glee because they will see that we are joining them in the cheap seats. We can no longer sell ourselves as having a premium product; we are going to sacrifice that and join all the other guys in growing the stuff that does not get as much return. Intelligent! Genius!

I cannot understand, for the life of me, how someone like Bill Crabtree, who has a direct vested interest in undermining non-GM crops in Western Australia, has been able to convince the other farmers in Western Australia, in the peak bodies. This does not involve everybody. In fact, even conceding the claims made by the government that around a quarter to a third of the acreage in Western Australia is planted with GM crops, I cannot understand for the life of me how these individuals and other bodies, such as multinationals, who have a vested interest, have convinced the peak bodies to advocate so robustly on their behalf—to undermine and sacrifice our competitive advantage and have us join our competitors in the cheap seats. I believe there are some former farmers in the government, and the government has benefited from the advice of a real farmer in the upper house, Hon Darren West. The government is ignoring his advice, but at least he is giving it. I cannot understand why the government has chosen this path.

**Mr C.J. Barnett** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** That makes me question it even more—why farmers? There are quite a few in the government ranks. Why would farmers willingly sacrifice that competitive advantage? I just cannot understand it. I know why Bill Crabtree wants to do it, because he owned intellectual property rights to GM wheat, and he would love to see all our wheat compromised and turned into GM, so that ultimately people will buy more of his product. I do not know—something like that, maybe. However, I do not understand why the vast majority of other farmers have conceded this competitive advantage so readily. There is a competitive advantage in the return that can be received right now. As I said, on this day it is \$40 a tonne.

There are also disadvantages in diminishing the diversity of crops, reducing the ability to combat herbicide resistance, and ultimately pesticide resistance. If farmers are going with only one crop, or limiting themselves to a smaller range of crops as provided by the GM technology owners—their range is not as diverse, because they own the intellectual property rights—they are increasing their vulnerability. Nature will do what it does; it will develop resistance to weapons that farmers use. For farmers using only glyphosate, we can bet our bottom dollar that before too long a herbicide-resistant weed will come up that is able to fight off glyphosate.

I have made three points. Firstly, there are intellectual property rights. That is what I think it is all about, and I do not know why we would go down the path of supporting a small number of multinationals owning the intellectual property rights to the crops that we sell and also ultimately consume. Secondly, we are sacrificing the competitive advantage of non-GM crops by taking this path. Thirdly, there is the vulnerability associated with diminishing the diversity of crops.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The fourth point I want to make is about consumer choice. This relates to the other points, in particular the one about the sacrifice of competitive advantage. Regardless of decades of effort by some pretty heavily funded campaigns on behalf of some very weighty multinationals, who have a vested interest in

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convincing people that there is a huge range of benefits from genetically modified food and that there is no threat from that food, the public does not agree. When given the opportunity to choose between a GM product and a non-GM product, the public will pay a premium for the non-GM product. That is reflected in the premium per tonne for canola right now in Western Australia. It is actually reflective of the food chain. The demand at the other end for non-GM food is higher and people are willing to pay a premium if they know that food does not contain GM. That may be unfair, and it may be wrong. It may be against some scientific premise. It may be against the findings of innumerable scientific studies funded by the same multinationals that are selling the seed. Nevertheless, it is a fact. If it were not a fact, we would not currently get \$40 a tonne premium on non-GM canola in Western Australia. There is demand for non-GM crops.

I think it is fairly arrogant, and contemptuous toward the consumer, to argue against GM labelling at the same time as arguing that there is no threat from GM food. Clearly, because members opposite say it in their speeches, the government believes that there is no threat from genetically modified products in food. We should have a far more robust labelling regime in Western Australia. We should provide consumers in Western Australia, who want the ability to choose, with the knowledge and ability to determine themselves whether they consume genetically modified products, and that means a more robust labelling regime. If there is no threat to the consumer from GM products in our food, then there is no threat to anybody resulting from compelling labelling, because all it will do is enhance the return for the non-GM producing farmers and other producers. They will be able to market their products to consumers as non-GM, and they will get the return that we know exists right now as a premium on non-GM product. There is no argument at all for anybody to say that we should not label GM products. This is where there is inconsistency in the arguments of GM advocates, particularly in Western Australia. They will say, firstly, that there is no threat from GM in food, which I do not have a view on either way, and then they will say that we cannot possibly label it, because it is everywhere, and we should not worry about it.

Those arguments are inconsistent. It cannot be argued that the supply chains for the export of our produce are able to separate genetically modified crops and non-GM crops, and also argued that GM is everywhere so producers who claim to be organic should not be able to do that, or that there should not be a threshold of zero for organics or that food should not be labelled as GM. I think a complete inconsistency in the argument has been revealed since the Marsh case. During the progress of that case there was consistent debate in the public domain about the validity of organic produce and certification. The argument made by the pro-GM lobby was that GM crops should be able to be in organic produce and that it should still be classified as organic. The only people who should determine what organic certification consists of and comprises are the organic certifiers, organic farmers and organic customers. Ultimately, the consumer should dictate the regulations, not the people in competition with organic farmers. A clear and obvious intent exists for those with vested interests in expanding GM in Western Australia—to erode any non-GM farming viability. They intend to do that by contaminating the entire state with GM products, and then declaring the entire state a GM state, basically. The intent is to contaminate the entire farming base of Western Australia to the extent that no-one can claim to be organic; ultimately, if it works, they think there will be a greater market for the product they own the intellectual property rights to. I think that is a fairly self-serving, negative and damaging objective, but it is being facilitated by the government. The repeal of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003 will diminish the capacity of any future government to constrain that objective—the objective being, as I see it, for GM proponents to contaminate everything so that there is GM only, and nothing will be able to be classified as non-GM. Those proponents will then benefit because they own the intellectual property rights or have some part in the supply of GM product.

That leads me to my last point that I feel is really crucial and has been completely overlooked by the government in the last eight years and during the entire debate around this subject. People who do not want to farm GM have rights. People who do not want to farm GM should have their rights protected by the government, in the same way as a farmer who happens to be adjacent to somebody who decides they want to bring in feral animals like deer. We constrain that proponent by ensuring that they have high fences that the deer cannot jump, and we hold them responsible if the deer get into the next-door neighbour's property and do damage. In the same way as we impose limitations on farmers who want to try different things—what they would call innovation—and bring something in that may be a threat to their neighbours, we should impose restrictions on farmers who want to take up GM farming in close proximity to farmers who do not want to engage in that practice. It should not be the responsibility of non-GM farmers to defend themselves against somebody who has chosen to change their practices or bring in a product with the capacity to undermine current practices, their value and farmers' investment. This is the protection of individual rights, and I would have thought it should have been a priority for a Liberal government. Sadly, this Liberal government has eroded and completely undermined small business in all manner of endeavours, including taxis and including down at the foreshore and Barrack Square—all over the place, including right around the state with land taxes. This government has abandoned any semblance of loyalty

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to small or individual businesses, and has imposed on those businesses a great deal of hardship as a consequence. It is doing it here, too. I know the intent behind the repeal of this act. I have said that it is a vote of confidence from the pastoralists and graziers in WA Labor, and I thank them for that. I know they think we are going to win and are fearful of that; they want to get rid of this act to prevent us from constraining GM in Western Australia, should we win.

In the final few minutes I will flag a couple of points. There are still ways of defending the rights of farmers who do not want to farm GM. The government promised, and never delivered, a register of locations of GM farming. While Hon Terry Redman had the portfolio quite a while ago, he did not pursue a rigorous enough trials process to determine whether there was any benefit with regard to return per hectare from GM crops. One of the things he did to try to placate the concerns of the wider farming community was to say, “We will publicise where these crops are grown. They will be registered and recorded and you’ll be able to see that.” That could still be done, regardless of this act being repealed. There can still be a register. It can still be ensured that neighbours know whether their neighbour is about to engage in growing a GM crop that may be a threat to their organic or non-organic but non-GM produce. The rights of non-GM farmers can still be defended by transparency and openness. That is one thing that can be done. A practice of far more robust labelling can also be engaged in, to ensure that non-GM farmers’ produce is recognised as such and they get the full return for their produce. Advocacy can also be engaged on behalf of Western Australia as being a clean, green producer—there could be differentiation in the categories of clean and green because there is a premium for non-GM. The state could be out there advocating on behalf of the people who produce that premium product. The state could still advocate for those who do not produce the premium product, but that fact would have to be acknowledged. Those and a few other things could be done. I know the likes of Bill Crabtree and Colin Bettles will be reading *Hansard* with great interest, or even watching it right now—hi, Colin!

**MR T.K. WALDRON (Wagin)** [11.49 am]: I will make some brief comments in support of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill 2015.

The GM debate has been long, vocal and sometimes very divisive. Being a guy from Kojonup, I was really saddened to see that two farmers from down there ended up in the courts. I have known both guys during the course of my life. Of course, the debate will continue. Today I want to put on the record my support for the bill, on the back of the majority of constituents across the Wagin electorate. I have been in this place for 16 years, but pretty much all my life I have represented the area in one way or another in various roles. I have come to know the people across that region pretty well, and can ascertain where the support is. That is not to say that many friends and people I know in the electorate do not support genetically modified crops. I just wanted to acknowledge today that although the majority do support GM, I acknowledge the right of those who do not support it to not support it, and I also acknowledge their opinions and their beliefs. When I first came to Parliament, this issue was talked about and I tried to have a really open mind about it. I have a farming background; we farmed at Kojonup. I have given quite a lot of time to both sides of the argument; I sat down with and listened to people. The people in my area who oppose GM will tell members that I have sat down with them and listened to their points of view. I have read a lot of their literature. Many members will know “Buddha” Harding from Williams. I have read the books that Buddha gave me, so I understand part of their argument.

**Mr M.P. Murray:** Didn’t the Williams shire wish to remain GM free?

**Mr T.K. WALDRON:** Yes. At that stage, it did do that. There are signs in Williams today that good friends of mine who oppose GM have put up in their paddocks. There are also signs that those who support it have put up along the road. That is why it is divisive. It is a shame, but that is the way of this debate. However, I support the majority of people across the region who support GM crops. I also feel quite strongly about the issue. I have listened to the comments today; members have made good comments. There will be further development of GM technology in the future. We should always follow that technology and watch the science properly and very closely. We should proceed with caution in this area, and I have always said that in the speeches I have made. I think we have done that pretty well.

I simply want to say today that I support the bill. I wanted to put on the record what I have done over that period to try to get a balanced view of it. My balanced view is that I support GM crops. The benefits both now and into the future for our farmers, the industry and food production—that is just the food side of GM; I will not go into the other areas—and for other countries as time goes on will be quite immense. As I said, we should always proceed with caution, but we also must look properly at the science and try to take some of the emotion out of it, because it is a very emotive debate.

I will leave my comments there. This year in my area and across country WA, we have probably had the best crops we have ever seen, but, unfortunately, the last month or so has been devastating with frost. That will have a huge effect on people to the point at which there could even be suicides. I hope we do not see that again, but

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I am really concerned about people in my area. I have been getting quite a few phone calls this week and I am trying to set up a few things in my area to help. I am no scientist, but I am hopeful that this technology—not just GM technology, but general technology—will develop further, as we have seen it develop to this point. Farmers have been some of the best innovators and have helped to develop technology. They have had to do that because of isolation et cetera. I am sure that in the future further development will assist in those areas and make our farmers more reliable and more productive. At the end of the day, that will be good for them, good for the state and good for the world.

**MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells)** [11.53 am]: I rise to oppose the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill 2015. The act that we are seeking to repeal is a very sensible one. It cannot be characterised as being anti-GM crops. On the contrary, it is a check in the system that enables Western Australians to decide which GM crops and which technology the member for Wagin just spoke of we have confidence in and are prepared to accept. That is the intent of the legislation and that is how the legislation has functioned since its introduction into Western Australian statute law in 2003. I think we should recognise the excellent work that Hon Kim Chance did in bringing that legislation to Parliament and putting it in place so that we had a way of determining which crops we would exempt from what was otherwise understood to be a ban on the growing of GM crops. It was a very sensible approach.

This is controversial technology and it is untried, and I will come to those issues. The point that I really want to highlight more than any is the marketing aspect. The member for Wagin just spoke about the right of farmers in his electorate to choose when they use GM technology. I know other members like to talk about GM technology as a tool in the toolbox that they can use when they work out their crop rotations, the most agronomically cost-effective way of running a series of enterprises on the farm and how to mix in a cropping cycle with that. Yes, that is all true, but there is only one thing that must govern a business's decision-making—that is, providing what the consumer wants. That is the golden rule. It is not what the producer wants to make; it is what the consumer wants. That is the golden rule of marketing. If the producer can produce a product that the consumer really wants, they will have a successful business. Yet in agricultural circles in Western Australia, we have turned that on its head and asked, "What is it that producers want to produce?" Where is the sense in that? It defies all marketing logic. Producers have to produce what the consumer wants, and then they have to ask the question: do consumers actually want it, with the technology that is available to us? If a straw poll were done of those in this chamber, in Parliament and in the Perth central business district, I can guarantee that the majority of people would not want to eat a sandwich made with bread that had been made with GM wheat.

**Mr P.T. Miles:** You have bread from the dining room.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** And is it made with GM wheat?

**Mr P.T. Miles:** I don't know whether it's GM wheat.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** You fool!

**Mr P.T. Miles:** You would have GM in everything you eat.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Member, do not degrade your already questionable reputation any further! We do not have GM wheat in Western Australia at the moment. Do not be such a fool by making such claims!

**Mr P.T. Miles:** We do not grow it in WA.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** So is the member suggesting that we import GM wheat into Western Australia? Only interject when you have something useful to contribute, please! I gather that the Minister for Emergency Services has carriage of this bill. Perhaps he needs to talk to other members of the frontbench who are making lunatic comments and degrading the quality of debate in this place—childish and useless comments.

**Mr R.F. Johnson:** Foolish comments!

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** And foolish comments.

I know the member is an enthusiastic partaker of afternoon tea. If a table with GM product, which would have to have been imported from elsewhere, and a table of non-GM product were set aside, I can guarantee that most people in this chamber would eat the GM-free product. That is the reality.

Getting back to my point, the golden rule of marketing is about providing the consumer with a product that the consumer wants. That is where we should be headed. We have in Western Australia the Department of Agriculture and Food. I support the idea of putting agriculture and food together, because it is the best way administratively for us to ensure in a bureaucratic sense that there are feedback loops between agricultural produce and our food supply and production networks. When the Department of Agriculture and Food talks about marketing food to consumers in a hungry world to make sure that food is what the consumer wants, it is

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being let down entirely by this approach whereby we say, “Let’s just do what the producer wants”, but it is only some producers.

We are in an extraordinary situation. As I understand it, the current Minister for Agriculture and Food did not even make a contribution to the debate on this bill when it went through the Legislative Council. We have had a succession of agriculture ministers. That suggests something about the current government’s commitment to agriculture and food. I think we have had four different agriculture ministers. None of those ministers has properly engaged on this topic. The one minister who probably did have some understanding of this issue was the member for Warren–Blackwood. However, he was totally captured by the policy position of the Liberal Party at the 2008 election. That policy position was pro-GM. The Liberal party had a very flimsy policy development process that resulted in one Bill Crabtree writing the policy for the Liberal Party in the lead-up to the 2008 election. That policy was all about allowing GM crops. It was on the back of that that the member for Warren–Blackwood as the then Minister for Agriculture and Food brought into this place an exemption order for the production of GM canola. We had some serious debate about that issue. We forewarned the minister at that time that if we were to allow GM canola to be grown in Western Australia, there would be conflict between neighbours, because one farmer would inevitably end up contaminating the GM-free product of another farmer. We then had the terrible situation of poor Steve Marsh and his family, who had their organic production system contaminated by the GM canola of the Baxters. The Marsh–Baxter case was played out in the courts in a tortuous way, and there was questionable financial backing of one side in that case. That was foreshadowed by us. However, unfortunately, the government went there anyway and gave an exemption to canola after we had said that it would be problematic because of the contamination risk.

The fact is that the legislation that we are seeking to repeal—the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act—provided an exemption for canola. We could say that the public airing of the debate and the discussion around it had worked to some extent. I was certainly of the view that we should not allow an exemption for GM canola. However, it became legal in this state to produce GM canola. I do not think it ever became legal to contaminate another farmer’s crop, and that has been the subject of the various court cases. The reality is that we have legislation in place that can shield us from other GM crops that might be suggested by an industry that is very successful at using its public relations ability to convince landholders to produce using GM product. The industry seems to be remarkably successful at convincing farmers to do that. It puts out all kinds of false promises. Farmers have said to me that it will be great when we have salt-tolerant wheat or frost-ready wheat. These are fanciful ideas. What we are really talking about with some of the potential of GM might be only the tiniest incremental change. That is the sort of change that we can bring about already through conventional plant breeding. Look at how successful our grain production industry is. I remind the member for Wanneroo again that we do not have GM wheat in Western Australia. I am not sure whether the wheat harvest has started just yet. The different varieties of wheat that we are currently growing will lead to a harvest of, I think, around 16 million tonnes. Those crops are the product of careful selective plant breeding using conventional plant breeding techniques. That has been very successful. That is why we have a very high standard wheat crop. If someone were to propose a GM wheat that could withstand high salt levels or soils that have a low pH level or are heavily waterlogged, that would be a false promise. There is no basis for those promises. The reality is that this technology is about making crops Roundup Ready and glyphosate ready so that the companies that have the licence for GM crops are able to sell more of the chemicals that are used to control weeds in those crops. These companies are not focused on the other things. In fact, those promises are illusory. The idea that a crop of any description would be able to grow in a highly saline area is ridiculous. There is a limit to how far we can push any plant species. The reality is that we have been told all these myths. The companies are dangling carrots about how we can solve all the problems of agricultural production in Western Australia by having GM products, when that is just not true.

What are we doing with this legislation? The government is seeking to repeal this very useful piece of legislation that has acted as a good check in the system. When this legislation is repealed, we will have to rely on the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator to provide any control. I do not think the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator has a particularly strong role here. In fact, it delegates most of its responsibility to Food Standards Australia New Zealand. FSANZ seems to be totally captured by the GM technology industry. The papers that FSANZ provides on its website are all about attacks on people who have managed to get the funding together to do long-term feeding trials. Those trials are very difficult to fund, because there is no commercial interest behind them. This body just seeks to attack those trials. Therefore, we do not have a reliable body in Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

We only need to look at some of the other areas in which Food Standards Australia New Zealand engages, or fails to engage. I do not know what this body is doing about combating the obesity epidemic in Australia. I do not see it actively campaigning for the labelling of sugar levels in food and exposing to the Australian public, and Western Australians in particular, the reality about the amount of sugar that is found in something as

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simple as a can of tomato soup. I was amazed to find out the sugar content in tomato soup. I thought that having a bowl of tomato soup at lunchtime was a healthy thing to do. However, it is full of sugar. The people at Food Standards Australia New Zealand are not interested in combating things like obesity. Therefore, I do not have confidence in their ability to regulate or oppose the misuse of various GM technologies. I think it is true to say that the people at Food Standards Australia New Zealand are captured by whatever the big agribusiness companies and food businesses want. The lowest common denominator style of food production is what they seem to be about these days. That is why our population has to face up to the reality of an obesity epidemic. It is interesting to make that comparison.

I note that Hon Peter Collier gave the second reading speech in the other place. I suppose we must have been between agriculture ministers at the time. There has been no continuity in terms of ministerial responsibility and ministerial engagement. Hon Peter Collier gave the second reading speech in the other place and he made special reference to the North American situation. Why did he not refer to the European situation? The European Union has a population of 500 million people and I think there is a much stronger connection to food. There is a much more educated population when it comes to food in general. I do not ever hear anyone hold up the North Americans as the ideal arbiters on good food. I hear that about European nations, but I do not hear that about the United States, yet where do we go with our food production system? We want to make it an American-style food production system. Do the US and Canada have obesity problems similar or perhaps worse than our own? Yes, they do. Does the EU? No, I do not believe it does. The minister representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food will have to explain why he is sending us on the North American path. Why is he not making sure that we take the healthier EU lead? Why do we not do that? Why is the minister engaging us on the pathway to obesity and unhealthy foods? That is something that the Department of Agriculture and Food needs to supply the minister with information on. I know the minister's primary interest would be in the fisheries area, and I support many of his endeavours in that area. The minister knows how important it is that when a fish or an aquatic product is marketed there is certification in place such as that of the Marine Stewardship Council. The minister knows that that works very well.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I know the minister understands how important that certification is for the good marketing of our aquatic resources. That attracts value to our product and it assists with its marketability. In the agricultural scene, the minister's colleagues, the succession of ministerial colleagues who have gone through the agriculture portfolio, have wanted to lead us on this race to the bottom to be commodity producers of a product that is indistinguishable—a lowest common denominator product, a product that is genetically modified and cannot be marketed as being regionally identifiable and GM free for which a premium price can be obtained. That is just craziness—absolute madness.

I know other speakers have touched on the issue of segregation—the idea that GM canola can be segregated from GM-free canola. I worked for Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd on a number of occasions, I think, for three harvests—1980–81, 1982–83 and 1983–84. I spent the early 1980s working for CBH in different roles. I can guarantee to the minister that there is any amount of grain mixing that goes on. There are people who operate receival points. A truck with a 10-tonne load comes in, somebody misreads the docket indicating the content of the truck and, unfortunately, it goes on the wrong heap. I have seen it happen and I am sure it still happens. The fact is that mix-ups occur and there is one example of the segregation system failing; I know it fails. People will make claims about the purity of the A1 wheat stack, and of course they do that, because it is all about retaining high price and value for that wheat stack, but the fact is that contamination occurs at the receival point. A person only has to drive out onto the Great Eastern Highway bypass to see the bright GM canola growing that has spilt from the trucks carting it. It cannot be sprayed out. Every other weed and plants species on the road verge area is dead because it has been hit by Roundup, but not the Roundup Ready canola; it is still there because it survived the spraying. That is the problem we have. These people producing the GM canola do not care about their contamination and pollution of a neighbour's property or of roadsides in general. They seem to think it is their God-given right to pollute the countryside and roadsides with the GM products if they happen to have a spill. There are spills; little bits blow off a truck. Canola grains are tiny; they are very light and very mobile. The same would happen with other products as well, whether it is GM oats, GM barley or GM wheat. With whatever we look at, we will find that there are problems. I am particularly concerned about the prospect of GM barley. There are already wild barley and weed species all over the place. If that were to be replaced by GM Roundup Ready barley, there would be no means of controlling it. Already there is resistance emerging, and there are enormous problems with that as well. The idea that the producers should be given the right to produce whatever they want is completely flawed; it is just not a good way to do business.

The best way to do business is to make sure we produce what the consumer wants. Of course, the real test there is the labelling that goes on any food product. There has to be clarity about that labelling. I mentioned the example of the sugar content in a can of tomato soup. The fact that a person has to get their magnifying glass out

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to be able to read it shows that there is not clarity of labelling at all. I think the same problem could arise if there was just to be the very bare minimum of labelling of GM content. That has to be changed to ensure that things are properly labelled so that consumers can really make a sensible decision about things.

Then of course, there is another major issue: the desire of many farmers to retain seed from one season to the next and to produce a crop based on the retention of seed from the previous year. They take seeds to the seed cleaners so they are of a high standard and are likely to produce a good crop when they are planted the next year. There is of course the potential with GM technology for these terminated genes, and so that cannot be done. There we see the ultimate business model of those involved in GM production, and that is about gaining control of the whole food production and cropping cycle. I think that is completely wrong. In developing countries, it is an issue of particular concern, because at the moment the owner of a small property can control their destiny by keeping seeds and selectively using them to their best advantage.

The current government has had a succession of agriculture ministers, and the current agriculture minister did not even speak on this issue, which he would have been perfectly entitled to do. Hon Darren West spoke at great length, with great knowledge and in great detail about this legislation when it went through the other place. A number of government members spoke on the legislation as well, but the current minister did not. How can it be that a minister who has not taken control of this issue or expressed a view in Parliament on it—has not engaged in the debate—is responsible for the passage of this legislation through Parliament? To me that is a further example of the very part-time nature of the treatment of the agriculture and food portfolio. There is a great danger when ministers do not properly engage with a portfolio that there is vulnerability to the corrupting influences that can come from peak body groups that have vested interests. There will not be the development of public policy that is in the best interests of all Western Australians. We are seeing exactly that situation play out in the consideration of this legislation. This bill has not been the subject of proper debate on the other side of the house. The other side has simply come up with a policy position and locked in on it. Members opposite have seen that it seems to be in vogue in North America and, on that basis, they think it is a good thing to do. They have not actually asked the deeper questions about whether this is good for Western Australian consumers, who would resoundingly reject the opportunity to consume GM food. That is not what people want to consume, so why on earth are we going to dominate our food production systems with GM? Why are we going to allow that to happen? It is as if we want to get to a point at which we can then tell people, “Oh well, you’re going to be consuming it anyway. It’s all around us. It’s all too late.” I see that a little in the minister’s second reading speech, in which he said that it is now over 30 years since the very first GM crops were grown anywhere. Since 1986, how aware has the general public been of the human feeding trials that were going on? I do not think the general public was made properly aware of those. What we have seen, though, is a rise in various things like allergies and other illnesses, as well as all sorts of digestive problems that people have. The diagnosis of those various complaints seems to be at a higher level than ever before. Perhaps there is a correlation. What we do know is that we have higher obesity levels than ever before, and I think there perhaps is some connection. The reality is that consumers do not want GM food if they are given the choice. If some producers want to produce a GM crop, they have to make the case to the consumers. When consumers are actually knocking on the door of the industry and saying, “Please, please give us a GM product”, then I think we would have to revisit this legislation, but at the moment that is not the case. I do not hear that from any food consumer or food industry group. I do not see any restaurant reviews that say, “Come and enjoy our menu, because we’ve got GM food on the menu.” That just does not happen. On the contrary, we do see a lot of restaurants promoting their organic sourcing of food supplies. Indeed, Parliament’s own dining room menu promotes our Western Australian product. It does not actually state that it is GM free, but there are plenty of other things that it notes—whether things are vegetarian, healthy, gluten free and what have you. There is just no way. Maybe this is the test: before we allow this legislation to go through this place, the minister should put on the menu GM corn chips—he will have to import the food, because I am not sure where one would get it from —

**Mr P. Papalia:** In bold, 20-point font.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** In bold, 20-point font—put it on the menu. Let us see how successful that product is on the Parliament House dining room menu. Let us see how many people actually eat it for an extended period. We could get some scientists to properly run this as a good, scientific, long-term feeding trial, and we would then have some real information to provide. Until we have done something like that, I do not think we should be endorsing this bill at all. The current format provides a wonderful check. Repealing the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act is a serious mistake. It is the one check that we have in the system. We need to retain this legislation. Again I say that when Hon Kim Chance brought this legislation to this place, it was with great foresight. He could foresee how the industry would want to push all sorts of crazy notions and false promises to grain producers and he wanted to have a Western Australian-based check in the system. That is what the government is doing away with. It is happy to hand over all responsibility of regulation on GM crops to federal

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bodies that have questionable records on food safety and questionable records when it comes to attacking the various health problems like obesity that we already face. They are not qualified to carry on.

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Parliamentary Secretary)** [12.24 pm]: As the member for Moore, I think it is important that I say a few things today about this important bill, the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill, which will repeal the legislation. The electorate of Moore is an area in which a very large amount of canola is grown, stretching up from Bolgart all the way to Yuna in the north. Within the whole of Western Australia, over one million hectares of canola is grown a year, and about 30 per cent of that is GM canola. We have heard that the repeal of this legislation will not leave a total absence of regulation in this area, because the federal Gene Technology Act 2000 continues to be in place and provides the appropriate protections for health, safety and the environment that are necessary as we assess whether any genetically modified organism is safe for use.

As the member for Moore, it is a very great pleasure to attend many, many agricultural events throughout my electorate and, in particular, the agricultural shows. This year thus far I have attended shows in Perenjori, Dalwallinu, Northampton, Moora, Toodyay and Mullewa, and I have Bindoon to come this week. I also attended the Mingenew expo and, outside of my electorate but important to it, the Dowerin field days. At not one of those events has someone come to me with a concern about the repeal of this legislation, but certainly at every one of those events I have been approached by farmers who are very concerned that this legislation will remain in place. They are urgently seeking a degree of certainty so that they can make decisions. They have to be able to forecast their crop rotations, they need to understand where they are going to access their seed from and to put in orders et cetera, and they are very concerned to ensure that there is certainty into the future for their farming operations. Of course, not everybody uses genetically modified canola. There are farmers in my area who are completely organic farmers. I do not actually get complaints from them about others using GM canola in the area. I will just pick up a point that the member for Gosnells made about Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd and his experiences there some 30 years ago or more, back in the day when he used to go out there and slave away on the bins on his uni holidays. Things have probably changed a little since those times, member. I think it is a great testament to CBH that it has been able to hold together the segregation of the GM and non-GM crops.

**Mr C.J. Tallentire:** How do they stop that happening now?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Separation of sites, for a start. In terms of the type of mixing that the member is talking about, I believe that Hon Darren West was personally involved in an incident in which he had a mix of GM and non-GM canola. It actually was not his fault—it happened at the bin; there was a contamination—but all of his non-GM canola had to go on the GM pile, because it was no longer considered to be non-GM. If there is any doubt, they will take the canola and put it on the GM stack.

**Mr M.P. Murray:** What about the finances there? What happens with that?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The farmer gets the penalty. Generally speaking, if it has occurred on his farm, that would be the case. In the case of what happened with Hon Darren West, members opposite would have to ask him personally, because that mix was outside of his control. Generally speaking, CBH has done a fantastic job of being able to assure customers that the product they are getting is either absent of GM to a certain level or has GM canola present. People are actually quite supportive of that. That is evidenced by the price premium that others have spoken about. If there was concern from customers that that CBH product was at all contaminated, they probably would not pay a price premium between GM and non-GM canola. The price premium reflects the fact that some customers prefer the non-GM product, which is why many farmers choose a mixture—sometimes they use GM; sometimes they use non-GM. Basically, they are looking to find the most profitable crop for their farm and the one that sets up the best crop rotations and the best system. That might change from year to year and paddock to paddock. A lot of farmers who have used GM canola in the past have found that it is not as effective or profitable as they had hoped and have gone back to a different variety or use a mix. The member for Gosnells talked about farmers retaining seed. That is true; over the years a lot of farmers have retained seed when GM canola is not an option for them. But in reality, it is also not an option for many other canola varieties, because many of the canola varieties grown are hybrids. The retention of seed leads to a substantial yield penalty, so most farmers look to buy fresh seed in any case. Although it was a nice point to make, it probably does not hold up in reality.

I do not want to take up too much time because I know the house is very busy, but, as I have said, I have been approached by many farmers in my electorate who are concerned about the potential threat to their farm businesses of not being able to grow GM canola. Only the other morning I received a letter from two couples who are progressive young farmers in the Mingenew district. With the forbearance of the house, I will let their words say what I think the industry generally thinks of this whole situation. According to my notes, they write —

Re support for the Genetically Modified GM Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill 2015.

Mr Mick Murray; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Paul Papalia; Acting Speaker; Mr Terry Waldron; Mr Chris Tallentire;  
Mr Shane Love; Mr Bill Johnston

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Given the Legislative Assembly will be debating the GM Crops repeal bill this week we wanted to voice our support.

It is absolutely vital that WA farmers continue to have the ability to access the latest plant breeding technology including Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) which are widely adopted in our competitor producing countries.

Broadacre farmers of WA are growing safe, nutritious food in some of the driest agricultural conditions in the world. More so, we are doing it in a completely free-trade environment unlike any of our international counterparts. We are proud to be producing some of the best quality grains, pulses and oil seeds in the world, and we have only been able to do so through running highly efficient businesses and uptaking the latest agricultural technologies.

As you are well aware Roundup Ready (RR) Canola is currently the only GMO available to WA farmers and the rapid adoption of the technology highlights its benefit to the state's growers. In particular, the NAR has had a significant uptake in RR Canola with the system consistently demonstrating increased yields and proving its ability to handle harsh conditions (this is widely documented through National Variety Trials as well as on-farm experience).

RR Canola is now a vital break-crop option for many areas in the Northern Agricultural Region (NAR) that had previously been unable to produce a profitable canola crop. This has greatly increased the flexibility of broadacre farming in the NAR, adding a string to our bow and improving the sustainability of cereal production which is the dominant broadacre crop.

As you are well aware RR Canola typically calls for reduced in-crop chemical regime which has both environmental and financial dividends. It has been repeatedly proven in peer reviewed studies as being safe for human consumption, and the myth that all farmers are being controlled by Monsanto is insulting to say the least.

It is important to remember that at this stage we are only discussing one GMO. GM technology has the potential to directly address other key barriers to production including drought and frost tolerance. For the sustainability of our industry it is absolutely critical that we are able to continue to access all safe agricultural technology and that must include GMO.

We wish you all the best as you debate this important Bill this week.

The letter is signed by James and Fiona Dempster and Ben and Hellene McTaggart from Mingenew, Western Australia.

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington)** [12.35 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill 2015. I am pleased to follow the member for Moore; it is rare that I do so. I am very pleased that he contributed to this debate. It is obviously an issue of great importance to his district and it would have been disappointing for him not to speak on such an important issue.

I will address a couple of things in the second reading debate. Firstly, I want to talk about the idea that Western Australia is a food bowl for Asia. Recently, we had discussions in this chamber about what happened in Ord stage 2. I make the point that what is called Ord stage 2 is, in fact, not Ord stage 2. Ord stage 2 was done in the 1960s; in fact, the member for Alfred Cove's grandfather was the minister who handled the stage 2 development of the Ord River scheme. What was done here was called Ord stage 2 because people had forgotten that there had already been two stages of the Ord scheme. It is interesting that what we call Ord stage 2 was just as successful as the original two stages of the Ord scheme in that the investment in that project was never returned! There is a fundamental reason that that investment was never returned; namely, there was no plan for what was going to be done with the land in the Ord. There was the hope that somehow or other in creating the precinct, it would be part of some food bowl for Asia. Fourteen thousand hectares of arable land is a rounding error effectively compared with the millions of hectares of arable land used in the wheatbelt. Members should think about this. Let us not worry about the commonwealth money, which went to social infrastructure so there was a purpose and an outcome; we are talking about the investment of state taxpayers' money. If that investment had been made in the wheatbelt, the return in increased agriculture productivity would have far outstripped the 14 000 hectares of additional land in the Kimberley. I would argue very strongly that when we look at issues in the agriculture sector, we have to look at return on investment. Clearly, the return on investment from the Ord extension is very small. We know that because that is what reports have shown. Seventy per cent of the land in the extension is still not under crop; just a tiny amount of extension is currently being used. If that money had been invested in the wheatbelt, the return on agriculture productivity would have been enormous. When the member for Moore talks to his constituents, he should point out that with all the problems that his constituents complain about in trying to get higher productivity from their land, the reason they are not getting help is that the

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Mr Shane Love; Mr Bill Johnston

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money was invested in 14 000 hectares of land in the Ord. A number of government members have referred to rural productivity and contributing to our export industries, but we have missed the best opportunity for improved productivity in our rural sector because the money was put into a misdirected project.

I refer to a great article in *The Conversation* a couple of months ago, which was written by an agricultural scientist who, with the northern development of Australia in mind, urged the rural sector to take the approach of the miners when making decisions about investments. The scientist looked at how the mining sector identifies a resource, a logistics chain and a market before making an investment. That is the way that investments in the rural sector should be judged. Indeed, that is, I argue, the way we should judge the use of genetically modified organisms in Western Australia. Let us have a discussion about the benefits or otherwise of genetically modified organisms, and, indeed, that is what I would argue about the investment in the Ord River scheme. Was that the best way to spend \$330 million of state government money if we wanted to improve productivity in the rural sector? That investment has created a massively missed opportunity. Australia is not in the top 20 rice producers in the world—it is nowhere near it—yet we were told that 100 000 tonnes of rice would be produced in the Ord scheme. We know that that is never going to happen because the trial crops up there did not work. Not only was the land productivity lower than that in the Murrumbidgee irrigation area, but also, in the end, we know that pests ate all the rice while it was still in the field. Even if it had been successful, where would the rice have gone? There was no access to markets from the Kimberley. The original trial crop in the Kimberley was trucked to Darwin and then exported to New Guinea because there was no other way of using the crop. If it was to be used domestically, it would have to have been trucked for five days to get to Perth, much less anywhere else in Australia. There was no logical way of getting that crop to market. Before the government spent \$330 million of taxpayers' money on the Ord scheme, one would have thought that it would have decided what it was going to do with the land instead of the other way around, which was to come into the Parliament every day and announce another use for the land. Imagine what could have been done with that money. Mr Acting Speaker (Mr I.C. Blayney), I know that your electorate is in regional Western Australia. Imagine if you had had \$330 million available to improve productivity in the rural sector in your region, including the electorate of Moore that abuts your electorate of Geraldton. We missed that opportunity because the government spent it on the Ord scheme so that the ministers and the Premier had something to cut a ribbon on rather than dealing with the underlying issues of the rural sector. Again, that is what we are doing here today—sloganeering rather than dealing with the fundamental issues confronting the rural sector.

I will make a point about Australia as a food bowl for Asia. Australia will play a major part in the food sector in Asia, but we will not be a dominant player in that sector. The dominant players will always be Asian countries because the food statistics show that an unbelievable amount of food is produced in Asia. We are, effectively, a rounding error when the figures are compared because rice is the principal crop in Asia. As incomes rise in Asia, so, too, will food production because the countries will be able to apply technology to increase their food production. I went to the In The Zone conference run by the Perth USAsia Centre at the University of Western Australia. This year the conference was held in Jakarta and the then Minister for Agriculture and Food, the member for Alfred Cove, spoke at that conference. My good friend the member for Willagee and I went up to be a part of the conference. In the afternoon at the conference these sessions were run—like TED talks—by a range of presenters. A university academic from Singapore made a presentation about automated greenhouses that had been developed in Singapore and can grow 10 000 tonnes of leaf vegetables on 10 hectares of land. Think about that, Mr Acting Speaker. They are getting 1 000 tonnes of food production off a single hectare of land—that is unbelievable. The presenter said that with 300 hectares, they can basically produce half the leaf vegetable demands of Singapore.

Where does that leave Australia? People need to understand that bulk commodities are difficult to produce. Members need look at only iron ore and all the problems for the junior players in that sector because of the fluctuation in prices. That is what has happened with bulk commodities generally. I know that the price of wheat this year has gone up and down. I do not pay attention to the price every single day; I understand that prices are starting to come up a bit, but up until now they have gone down. *The Economist* tracks these things over hundreds of years. All the prices go up and down, but overall they go down. In 1969 the Club of Rome published its book *The Limits to Growth*. Every year since, commodities have gone down up until the China boom. That boom was a unique situation, so the terms of trade of bulk commodities will decline compared with those of other commodities. We know that because that is what has been happening for two centuries and will continue to happen in the future. I am saying that there should be a proper discussion about what the future of our agricultural sector looks like. If it is just an argument about volume, we are missing the point. It cannot be an argument about volume; it has to be an argument about quality and price. We should look at getting a premium price for a particular product, and not volume, because volume is a path to pain. If members want to talk about it, they should talk to BHP Billiton Ltd and Rio Tinto, but, more to the point, talk to Atlas Iron to see what happens with the path to volume—there will be pain going that way. We have to get

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to premium produce. We have to get to products that can ensure that we have got something different. This cannot be about just volume. The 2012 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations statistics show that Australia is sixth in the world for wheat production, fourth for barley, sixth for canola and seventh for beef, but we are not in the top 20 for rice, soya beans or maize, and our position for wheat will decline in the future as central Asian republics, Turkey and other countries improve their productivity. All the productivity improvement that has happened in Australia over the last century will be applied in those countries as well, and guess what? Their productivity will increase. Why will that happen? It will happen because they have rising incomes, which means they have a rising capacity to pay for things.

I have not been to the Netherlands but members should go there. That country uses high-rise towers for pig production. There is no way that we could do that intense pig production in a low-income country because it would not be able to get the price for the produced food, but as the income rises suddenly that country can apply technology and increase food production. There is this myth that the rising population in Asia is therefore increasing the opportunity for Australian farmers. That is not true because the countries with rising populations have rising food production. In fact, if we track back over the last 50 years from World War II to today and take Indonesia as an example, its food production has risen faster than its population. In China the figures are even more dramatic. Again, in the Club of Rome's 1969 book *The Limits to Growth*, its analysis of future food demand has allocated lower calorie consumption to Asian and African people because historically that has been the case. Middle-class Asian people now have the same calorie consumption as Australians and other westerners, and guess what? Their physical characteristics have changed. It is not that Asian people have always been smaller than western people; it is that they have had lower calorie consumption. When they have the same calorie consumption, they end up with the same physical attributes. There was this view—I think some people still hold it—that somehow we are different. Actually, we are the same. When we apply higher technology and greater inputs to food production, food production goes up. We know that, because that is what has happened in Australia, and it is happening everywhere else in the world. If we concentrate on volume, we will end up in pain and agony. We know that, because we saw exactly that in the iron ore sector.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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