

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

*Second Reading*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

**The PRESIDENT:** In giving the call to Hon Darren West, I note that you have spoken for some time. I want you to be aware that I am very cognisant of the explanation provided by the previous Acting President on repetition and relevance. You cannot use different people in the chair as an excuse for going over old ground four or five times. You have to bring new material to the debate.

**HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural)** [5.05 pm]: Thank you, Mr President. I certainly appreciate your advice and guidance. I have moved onto a new subject in my contribution and this, I think, is the second-last new and relevant piece of information that I want to discuss in what I concede has been a lengthy contribution on a very complex issue. There is certainly a lot to discuss on this matter; it needs a full explanation.

I got onto an important matter related to the repeal of this act—namely, of allaying community safety concerns around genetically modified foods and organisms. Before we broke for question time, I was referring to the fact that a minimal amount of work has been done on this area in Western Australia. The only study done about the appropriateness or otherwise of the introduction of GM food in Western Australia and its use in animal diets has been done by Dr Judy Carman. I ran briefly through her CV, which will be on the record, about how suitable Dr Carman was to undertake research into genetically modified organisms and feeding trials et cetera.

In 2005, the then Minister for Agriculture and Food granted the Institute of Health and Environmental Research Inc funds for an animal feeding trial to evaluate the safety of genetically modified foods. I would have thought that was an appropriate and responsible action for the government of the day to take, especially when there was such community concern, such uncertainty and such suspicion in the community about using genetically modified foods, either directly for human consumption or in diets of animals fed for human consumption. In 2007, the Department of Agriculture and Food paid the Institute of Health and Environmental Research \$92 000 for the study. It was quite an extensive, well-funded piece of research, and as I think we have established, was done by a clearly eminent researcher in the area. I think it was right and proper. I note that this government has sought to undertake no further feeding trials. I will shortly get to why that is relevant to this Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill. But I note that this government has chosen to take no further trial work in this area. I think that is alarming and it is difficult to comprehend why the state of Western Australia, in introducing such a contentious crop, would fail to pick up on this research and work it through in more detail.

I move to the study itself. In October 2008, the department asked Dr Judy Carman from the Institute of Health and Environmental Research Inc for details of the expenditure of the funds and information about the publication of the resultant paper. In 2009, Dr Carman advised the department that the animal feeding study had been completed. I will go into some more detail about that later. I just want to paint a picture for members for why I will get to that, which is to outline the relevance of this trial. In 2009, Dr Carman advised the department that the animal feeding study had been completed, all the funds were spent, and the results would be published in a peer-reviewed journal in the first half of 2010. For those friends of ours in academia, of course “peer reviewed” means that it was circulated among the academic community to seek comment, verification and clarity. The study was published in the *Journal of Organic Systems*. Food Standards Australia New Zealand assessed the paper and provided the following advice on the scientific merits of the study. Food Standards Australia New Zealand ran a comprehensive assessment of the study. It made the following key points in that assessment —

In June 2013, Dr Judy Carman and co-authors published a paper in the *Journal of Organic Systems* on a feed study in pigs. The pigs were fed either a mixture of GM corn and GM soy or an equivalent non-GM diet for nearly 23 weeks. The GM diet was derived from plant lines approved for food use in Australia and New Zealand ...

It is a very important point to reiterate that the material used in the study was derived from approved plant lines that were approved for use in Australia and New Zealand. These products were readily available in the feed industry should they be required.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** What year was that?

**Hon DARREN WEST:** This report was published in June 2013.

There were no differences. This is in the response from FSANZ. We are talking about food safety and it is relevant to why we need to retain the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003. There were no differences between pigs fed on the GM and non-GM diets for feed intake —

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** How has the existing act contributed to avoiding this sort of stuff? Sorry to interject, but I thought you might want to put some relevance into the debate.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I am trying to make the point that this study and this paper was done under the auspices of the existing act. It is very important for members to realise that once the state cedes all its powers to Canberra when it comes to GM technology crops, I am unsure whether the state will still have the capacity to carry out important research such as this without the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003. I could be corrected on that, but that is certainly the understanding —

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Why don't you sit down and we'll see if someone wants to correct you on that!

**Hon DARREN WEST:** It will not be all that long. I am sure members are making notes. I can see Hon Jim Chown furiously writing.

**Hon Ken Travers:** I will not be correcting him; I will be reinforcing the points he has made!

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Yes. There is plenty of time in this debate for members.

I am quoting from FSANZ's response —

There were no differences between pigs fed the GM and non-GM diets for feed intake, weight gain, mortality and blood biochemistry parameters but the authors attributed severe stomach inflammation and enlarged uteri to the GM diet.

**Hon Peter Collier** interjected.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** I think this information is quite relevant because there are concerns about community safety.

*Point of Order*

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** My point of order relates to standing order 48. I am finding this very interesting, but even my interest about uterine disorder in pigs starts to wane after I have heard it for about the fourth time. I am yet to hear how this relates to the bill.

**The PRESIDENT:** Hon Darren West, as mentioned by previous Acting Presidents in this chair and at the beginning of this little segment of your remarks, you have to introduce new material into the debate. To summarise the main points is fine, but to go over and over points at length is extending it into tedious repetition. I would ask the member to confine his remarks to new and relevant information.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon DARREN WEST:** Thank you, Mr President. I will move on from that section and onto the key points made by Food Standards Australia New Zealand as a consequence of this study. I will raise these points because they are food for thought for members, and at the end I will pose them a question. FSANZ had some concerns about the validity of this study, and its key points include the following —

The authors have not provided convincing evidence that stomach inflammation was present. The stomach data, as presented, do not support the authors' interpretation and conclusions because:

The presence of "inflammation" was determined by visual appearance (reddening) only, without any microscopic (histological) confirmation. This is not considered a reliable method for establishing the presence of true inflammation, because it relies solely on the colour of the tissue which can vary for many reasons.

The response goes on to make a lot of other claims that cast some level of doubt, it is fair to say, on the study. There are references to statistics that are not included in the report. It casts doubt on the relevance of some of the side effects that were noticed in the pigs. As members know, the trial was done on pigs for a reason. The response then states —

Overall, the data presented in the paper are not convincing of adverse effects due to the GM diet and provide no grounds for revising FSANZ's conclusions about the safety of previously approved glyphosate-tolerant and insect-protected GM corn lines and glyphosate-tolerant GM soy lines.

As a consequence of this study, Food Standards Australia New Zealand says that it does not have enough information to categorically say that these foods are unsafe. I can accept that; it is a reasonable finding by FSANZ. But I am surprised that no further trial work has been done in this area by this government since the 2005 commissioning of this study and since it was published in July 2013. We have now moved on almost three years and certainly there was some cause for concern—I will not read out all of FSANZ's ruling in the interests of brevity. Concerns were raised even though FSANZ remained unconvinced that the food was unsafe. When such findings are made and when someone as eminent as Dr Judy Carman has concerns, perhaps the state should have done some further research into the safety of crops produced in Western Australia. But none of that research has been done, and I do not think any of that research will be done if we pass this Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Repeal Bill 2015 and allow those sorts of decisions to be made in Canberra. Further research

needs to be done in Western Australia, and I believe that the person to commission that research is none other than the Minister for Agriculture and Food. The ABC certainly saw that study by Dr Judy Carman in another light. Its interpretation of that study was different from FSANZ's, but I will not read out its report verbatim. It was certainly quite a lengthy story reported by the ABC on 12 June 2013, saying that the study had thrown doubt on the safety of genetically modified corn and soy. It found that pigs that ate the genetically modified corn suffered a significantly higher incidence of health problems. Certainly, an opinion in the community is that this study throws enough of a shadow of doubt about the safety of these foods. It may not confirm that foods are unsafe, but it certainly throws enough of a shadow of doubt on to the genetically modified foods used in this trial to warrant further research.

I think before we rush off and repeal legislation that enables the state government to make these sorts of decisions and to fund and follow up such research, we should take that step. I note that the Department of Agriculture and Food budget has been cut again, but I certainly hope work further to what was done by Dr Judy Carman in 2013 will be done and reported and commented on by Food Standards Australia New Zealand. The government appears reluctant and one can only ask why the government seems to be reluctant to commission further work when clearly, to both the layman and, I believe, the academic, this study casts some doubt on the safety of the food. I will make one point about that.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.