

## GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS — LABOR PARTY POSITION

### *Statement*

**HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary)** [6.28 pm]: They say that 24 hours is a long time in politics, but in less than 24 hours we have seen a seismic shift of 180 degrees in the Western Australian Labor Party's policy on genetically modified crops. I am more than happy to see this shift on a matter that has been debated in this place for weeks and weeks. I have no idea why this policy has changed dramatically in the past few hours, but a number of questions arise from this: Why did the Labor Party spend weeks and weeks wasting the time of this house on this matter? Why has the Labor Party on more than one occasion made statements in the public arena and in Parliament that it was prepared to remove the exemption for GM canola? How has this come about? I will quote a press statement on ABC Rural at 3.00 pm. The opposition spokesman for agriculture, Mick Murray, made this statement —

“We have a policy position as anti-GM. We understand now that with GM canola already out there, you just can't turn the switch off,” ...

GM canola has been out there for at least six years and the Labor Party has just found out that it cannot roll back an industry that is worth hundreds, if not millions, of dollars to rural communities! The Labor Party's dysfunctional leadership and arrogance on this matter, which is breathtaking, means that it has just come to this decision in the last few hours. In eight years in this place, I have never seen such an event take place.

I am more than happy to see that the Labor Party has taken the position of this responsible government and is, as the release says, “reconsidering” its long-held anti-GM policy position in this state. We all know that “reconsidering” is party-speak for “We're changing our damn minds.” Labor Party members are changing their minds is because their leadership has no comprehension—none at all—of what takes place in regional Western Australia. Labor Party members have decided to make a policy shift for political expediency, because they know that unless they do that, they will not get any support in the community. I can assure members opposite that that lack of support will be demonstrated on Saturday.

There is more on this matter. This is what the Labor Party is really about, and the community of Western Australia needs to take note. It is written here as a statement from the Labor Party's agricultural representative, Mick Murray —

Labor will now look at rules, regulations and possibly legislation to make co-existence more harmonious.

Mick Murray is not talking about coexistence between you and me, Mr President. He is talking about GM and non-GM crops. The Labor Party is now changing its position to one in which it is going to legislate and make regulations, and tell a responsible and mature industry how it should carry on its business. I am sure the unions operate like that. However, in the real commercial world, that does not happen. I suggest to every Labor member that on this particular matter, they visit regional Western Australia, talk to the people involved in the industry and look at GM and non-GM crops from a neighbouring perspective and a farming perspective, growing harmoniously together. The growers do not need legislation. They do not need regulations. They need government to get out of the space and let them get on with doing their job properly.

### *Statement*

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition)** [6.31 pm]: This afternoon, ABC Rural published an online story, claiming a major backflip by WA Labor on genetically modified food. As we have seen, this has caused a certain amount of excitement in the house—certainly in the lead-up to the performance that we just got, there was a lot of excitement. The story claims a major backflip based on an interview with the shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mick Murray. Not all of the interview is reprinted in this article, but there are certain selective quotes. For example, there is a reference to coexistence. I am advised that what is not in the online article, of course, is the conversation that occurred immediately before that interview in respect of canola specifically. Nothing has changed—I am advised, and I checked this afternoon—in our position, which was set out in the most recent debate on the bill that we dealt with on this matter by me on 21 June, by Hon Stephen Dawson on 22 June and by Hon Darren West on 10 May. I appreciate that there is a certain amount of salivation by a particular part of the rural media and those opposite in claiming some kind of great gotcha moment on our position on GM. However, sadly, despite your beautiful performance, Jim, this is not it.