

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS FREE AREAS ACT 2003 — REPEAL

Motion

HON PAUL BROWN (Agricultural) [11.24 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house recognises the benefits to the state that repeal of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003 will bring through increased confidence in investment and research and development extension in agriculture.

My reason for bringing this motion to the house today is primarily around the significant number of calls to me and to my office for the repeal of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003. It is evident from calls to my mobile phone and my office, and through email contact, that a significant number of producers and citizens of the Agricultural Region want this act repealed.

Let me state from the outset that I support the repeal of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act, as do the Nationals WA, the Western Australian Farmers Federation and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association. It was the Nationals' Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Terry Redman, who provided the initial exemption for genetically modified cotton and canola to be grown in trials across the state, giving confidence to the GM industry. As stated in the motion, the repeal of the GM Crops Free Areas Act will indeed bring a greater level of confidence to our agricultural sector, driving investment that will deliver the growth in the production of agricultural commodities that is being demanded by our customers and growing populations across the world.

Before I continue, I want to comment on just how ridiculous and irrelevant this legislation is. It was not introduced to protect human health and safety or the environment but to protect markets and the state's good reputation, as was stated in the second reading speech by Hon Kim Chance, the then minister, when he first introduced the bill in 2003. It was never designed to protect the people or the environment, as it had already been agreed with the federal government that the Gene Technology Regulator would make the decision to release GM varieties after comprehensive assessment of the risks. That was agreed to by the state minister at that time. It was never designed to protect the state from contamination; in fact, all that the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act does is to limit genetically modified organisms being grown in this state. The act does not limit the transport, consumption or use of GMOs as feedstuff for animals and it does not limit people from consuming it either. The Nationals' minister Hon Terry Redman granted exemptions to grow GMOs. Prior to that exemption, and even now, I could take a road train to Victoria and load up with GM canola. But because I cannot bring it back through South Australia, which has a total ban on GMOs and does not accept GMOs in any way, shape or form, I would have to drive the load from Victoria, through New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory to the Western Australian border with the Northern Territory at Kununurra. If I wanted to take that load to the wheatbelt, Esperance or Albany, I could drive the length of the state, potentially contaminating the whole state. If members listen to opponents of GMOs, they argue that transporting GMOs creates a contamination issue. However, that was not considered by the minister of the day. I could transport it, eat it, and feed it to my livestock, but I could not grow it! How ridiculous is that, if it poses such a risk?

Has the original intent of the act been effective? Have our markets been compromised? That was the original intent of the act, according to the second reading speech. No, our markets have not been compromised; in fact, since the introduction of GM canola into the Western Australian farming system—this is CBH Group's own information, which it gave to me—we have successfully exported over four million tonnes of canola to very discerning non-GM markets. There has been no impact on the market. Not only have our markets not been compromised by the introduction of genetically modified organisms, but also the demand for GMO products has increased and the organic food industry has expanded. The overwhelmingly vast majority of cotton produced in Australia is a GM variant. In fact, 99 per cent of all Australian-grown cotton is GM. Where does most of that cotton go? It goes to overseas markets. I have not seen opponents of the introduction of GMO twisting themselves into knots about that. We talk in here about GM all the time. The *Marsh v Baxter* court case has finished and there has been an outcome. The Supreme Court of Western Australia has deemed that no contamination has occurred and there have been no adverse effects.

What will repeal of the act mean for WA agriculture? Let us forget for a moment that WA has had such a rapid uptake of GM canola since 2010, which has meant that more GM canola is being grown in WA than in all of the other states combined. In fact, a table I have here shows that this year 436 534 hectares of GM canola will be grown in Australia, of which 337 000 hectares will be grown here in Western Australia—that is, 31 per cent of the state's canola crop will be GM, a massive increase from five years ago when no GM canola was grown here. Now, 337 527 hectares of GM canola will be grown across Western Australia. If the other side of the chamber got that sort of bump in its polling, it would be over the moon.

Let us also forget for a moment that Western Australian farmers have chosen to adopt GM varieties because of high yields, superior weed control and greater on-farm economics. It would demonstrate to the world that WA is open for business and that it is ready to compete in a global market on a level playing field with our competitors. The Competition Policy Review draft report released in 2014 identified that a moratorium on the commercial cultivation of GM crops is nothing more than a state-based regulatory restriction on competition. The Productivity Commission also recently highlighted that state-based moratorium. For the sake of Hon Darren West, who spoke on the radio the other day and who did not seem to understand what a moratorium is, a moratorium is a complete ban and not something that we will have a look at on a case-by-case basis. It is a complete ban.

Hon Ken Travers: A moratorium is not a complete ban.

Hon PAUL BROWN: In conventional language it is regarded as a complete ban.

The Productivity Commission recently highlighted that state-based moratoria are inconsistent with good policy-making processes and that regulations in South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT imply a level of concern about GM crop reduction that is not supported by the evidence.

That brings me to the “jelly blob” effect and what that is. The jelly blob effect is what we see when opponents of GM technology cannot defend their ground in the face of a cogent argument so they continue to move. It is like poking a blob of jelly with a finger but not being able to nail it down because it keeps moving and re-forming. It is very similar to some of the members’ arguments on the other side of the chamber. “We have to protect our markets,” they say. Our markets have not been compromised, as I have already discussed. “Japan will not accept GM grain,” they say; but it accepts more than two million tonnes of GM canola and soybeans annually. “China will not accept GM,” they say. In fact, 1.75 million tonnes of Australian GM and non-GM canola has been delivered to China since it opened its borders in 2013, which delivers \$1.1 billion to Australia. China accepts nearly three million tonnes of GM canola from Canada and 60 million tonnes of soybeans from North and South American countries every year. Opponents of GM also say that we need to protect the health and safety of people, but never show evidence to support their claims. In fact, the only evidence they ever offer up is the Seralini study, which has been roundly criticised by every serious scientist in the world and which has never passed peer review. No adverse incidents from GMOs have ever been recorded. In fact, new technology is allowing significant health benefits from new innovation in horticultural and agricultural industries.

Many members may have heard about the release of the non-browning Arctic apple developed by using new breeding technologies that dial up the expression of genes that cause browning. This non-browning technology developed in Australia by the CSIRO has cut waste and has resulted in an apple rich in antioxidants. There has also been the development of the non-browning potato, which stops the production of acrylamide that is believed to be a carcinogenic by-product when potatoes are cooked at very high temperatures. There has also been the development of golden rice, which we have all heard about and which featured in the news when a crop in the Philippines was savagely cut down by GM opponents. The development of golden rice will help to prevent the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children across the world from vitamin A deficiency. Oil seeds with a healthier oil profile and grains with a healthier starch profile have been developed by the CSIRO—not Monsanto. None of the innovations I have referred to have transgenic gene technology; they are all new breeding technologies.

Opponents of GM crops also say that we have to protect the environment. The reduction in the use of chemicals in GMOs has a beneficial impact on the environment; we are able to use increasingly benign chemicals or no chemicals at all due to the ability to dial down or dial up the expression of genes to produce beneficial traits. Since the introduction of GM cotton, chemical pesticide use has reduced by more than eight per cent in most crops, with many not needing any pesticide control at all.

Opponents also say that there needs to be coexistence between GM, conventional and organic farmers. Coexistence between competing production methods exists every day. Coexistence between different farming methods occurs every day, whether it is in the production of soft wheat next to hard wheat or malting barley alongside feed barley. Farmers in WA today are using GM and non-GM canola in their crop rotations. My cousin, who has 22 000 acres in Yuna, is one of those very farmers who uses both types of technology.

Finally, opponents will say that we have to provide protection against product contamination. Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd, WA’s biggest grain merchant and transporter, will say that it has successfully reduced the risk of contamination through careful planning and management. After more than seven years of GM production of canola in Australia there has not been a single incident of an end user receiving what they did not order in terms of GM status.

The repeal of this act will remove a major disincentive for private enterprise, both at an international level and for WA producers. People will have the confidence to continue to develop their programs and to benefit from

increased farm economics. For Western Australia to have a modern, sustainable and profitable agriculture industry competing in a rapidly developing, technologically global advanced market, we have to rid ourselves of this ridiculous piece of legislation.

I look forward to hearing the contributions of other members, and I commend my motion to the house.

HON MARK LEWIS (Mining and Pastoral) [11.38 am]: I commend Hon Paul Brown for bringing this motion to the house. It is an important matter to debate because debate of genetically modified crops is often driven by emotion and sometimes politics. It is very important to highlight this matter and to be able to debate the facts.

I would also like to point out that Hon Brian Ellis, who is away on urgent parliamentary business, would concur with my remarks. Yesterday he told me that he had had a very similar motion on the notice paper that he wanted to bring to this house during debate of members' business, but gave up his slot—I am not sure who to. Otherwise he would have presented a similar motion to this place earlier. I am sure he would concur with the honourable member's motion and the points he has made.

I will not go over the number of hectares growing GM crops. Hon Paul Brown went through that. I have different figures, but they are within an acceptable order of magnitude. Needless to say there has been a big increase in the amount of genetically modified crops, particularly canola, grown in Australia.

Hon Paul Brown did not bring up that since the introduction of GM canola, Australia has produced over 17 million tons of canola. On a lighter note, I have not seen any Frankenstein-type people running around the country because they have consumed some of those 17 million tonnes of canola.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon MARK LEWIS: Thank you, Madam Deputy President; we probably stopped that at a very appropriate time.

From the outset I have believed that GM and non-GM crops can coexist. I support coexistence. The difficult part of this debate for the protagonists is the environmental benefits of GM crops. We know from surveys of growers already using GM crops that they have reported using less diesel and significantly less herbicides. Indeed, future GM traits may see growers use even less chemicals. I would probably go further and say that they will use fewer chemicals. Obviously, growers can be a lot more environmentally sustainable going down that path. We will continue to face challenges with the growing population, harsh seasons, less land and less water, and we cannot afford to turn our backs on this emerging technology.

There is often an argument about the use of organics versus production-type systems. A seminal report by a major Green lobby group—the World Wildlife Fund or the like—tried to argue that using organics is far better for the environment. As it turns out, that report was buried because it said that using traditional organic-type techniques required clearing vastly more land. The report did not really suit the agenda or rhetoric of the time and it was buried, but it did see the light of day, and it shows that if we use sensible farming systems, we can reduce our environmental footprint in a land mass context. I think there are significant environmental advances and big advantages from GM crops. The advances and advantages from GM crops are not only in agriculture, but in plant breeding for the rehabilitation of mining and other areas. We have very challenging areas to be rehabilitated that require new, more vigorous plants. I know we are working with people in China to bring in plants and there is a seed bank that will allow us to take advantage of more vigorous-type plants further down the track with the use of GMO.

With respect to trade and business benefits, as the member pointed out, Canada is one of our biggest competitors, which has now gone to 90 per cent GM crops. We cannot afford to slip further behind Canada and lose that competitive advantage, because the rest of the world will do it, and we will languish behind in a market and trade sense. With a clear pathway—the repeal of this bill will send a clear signal that we are prepared to go in this way—there will be incentive for companies to invest in these areas in WA. In my own region, we are looking at northern development and obviously commodity crops such as cotton will be a big part of the future of the Ord and the other areas we are potentially looking at. Just in the Ord there is 50 000 to 80 000 hectares in which the potential of GM cotton would be significant. From the perspective of my electorate, the repeal of this act would be a significant boon to us.

A speech at the National Press Club of Australia caught the attention of members in the members' bar the other day. Mr Jon Entine, who is a senior research fellow at the University of California and a journalist who lets facts rather than emotion inform him, was in quite an interesting Press Club debate. I encourage members to download the podcast of that session because it was very informative and a debate we do not often hear. That is the thing about this debate, we do not often hear advocacy of GM crops and it is often good to get facts rather than

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emotions. Mr Entine pointed out that we do not want Australia to be an exporter of technology and ultimately see parts of our industry wither away. He put the challenge: do we want to be at the forefront of technological change that can feed the world in a constructive way?

In the very limited time I have left, I want to mention that Mr Entine drew an analogy with the Luddites. For members who do not know where the word “Luddite” comes from, it is the name of a group in England who railed against technology during the Industrial Revolution. I put to members that those who rail against GM technology are not progressives, but Luddites, because they are against technology, and we do not want to see that in WA in any way, shape or form. Rather than being progressive, particularly those in the Greens section, go right ahead and be a Luddite.

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [11.48 am]: My position on the repeal of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003 is very clear. All along I have supported the repeal of the act. Interestingly, in 2004, when this act came in, the then government banned all GM crops in the state. When there was a change of government in 2008, the government by special exemption allowed GM cotton to be grown commercially in the Ord. Most people think it was only a trial; it was not. If people wanted, it could be grown commercially.

Hon Ken Travers: Previously, you allowed trials.

Hon KEN BASTON: Trials were allowed. In fact, in 2007, Hon Kim Chance had trials down in Esperance, which were the first trials for GM canola in the state, which is interesting. In 2010, of course, there was the exemption for GM canola to be grown in the state.

I was looking through my files and discovered that a very similar motion to this was moved in August 2007. It stated —

“That this House consider as a matter of urgency the Carpenter Government’s refusal to lift the ban on genetically modified crops in light of compelling evidence that the technology is safe, it is accepted by a growing majority of consumers and its continuation is disadvantaging Western Australia in a competitive market.”

That was signed by the then honourable member for South West Region, Hon Barry House, shadow Minister for Science and Innovation; Biotechnology. I was going through some of the newspaper clippings from that time, and it is interesting that the whole debate that was going on then is still going on now, but, as I said, the wheels are going in the right direction. Hon Paul Brown, who I thank for bringing this motion to the house, asked who was on side. I can assure him that the Liberal Party is on side, and at the Liberal Party state conference in August last year, I made it very clear that I believed the industry was sufficiently mature to handle its market requirements without intervention of the act.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! The minister has the call.

Hon KEN BASTON: Last year, 20 per cent of the canola grown in the state was GM, and this year I am told that 30 per cent of the canola crop is GM. This is being done without end users complaining that they have received canola that did not meet the non-GM standards. Farmer profitability is extremely important and one farmer came to see me. He had in the order of 5 000 hectares, so he was a fairly big grain grower. He planted both GM and non-GM canola, and the difference in the bottom line for him was in the order of \$350 000.

Hon Ken Travers: On what differential rate was that price based?

Hon KEN BASTON: He had grown both, and the yield was the main thing that gave him the edge. The yield did not seem high to me; however, when it was amortised over the whole lot, the figure was in the order of \$350 000. That is real money, in my opinion, and obviously people would want to do that.

Of course, other reasons for growing GM are the weather and the challenges of the growing conditions. It is important that all technology is taken on board, whether it be GM or things such as Doppler radar and communication towers et cetera. There are other reasons for using this technology, and I will just give a couple of examples. One example is the fact that a vitamin A deficiency causes between 250 000 and 500 000 children a year to go blind, and it kills some 668 000 children under five each year in some countries. Golden rice was mentioned by Hon Paul Brown. It is genetically modified to contain more vitamin A and is designed to help tackle the things I have just mentioned. That initiative has been backed by donors such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the USA, and it goes on.

The other good thing about GM crops is the reduction in chemicals used. In Australia, GM cotton now counts for some 95 per cent of all cotton grown, and the amount of pesticides used has reduced by some 85 per cent. These are significant and real benefits and, through years of research, have cost millions of dollars. These things do not

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just happen, and that is why it is important to repeal this legislation so that we give the message that investment in Western Australia is welcome. I believe it takes some 13 years to bring a new GM crop to the market and it can cost anywhere up to \$136 million.

One of the major concerns of farmers I have talked to is that without a clear pathway to that market, biotech companies will simply not invest here. I was going through some notes—I do not have them here—and I found that during the debate in 2007, a similar issue came up, and I think one of the companies withdrew from doing further research here because of that.

I am certainly a firm believer that farmers, and consumers for that matter, should have choice in what they grow and what they eat, and labelling will come into this in the future. One of the federal papers I read stated that there would be labelling. The Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act certainly gives farmers choice in what they can plant. It was set up as a market in the beginning, because there was concern about contamination between the two sorts of crops, but Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd has now mastered that and there have not been any problems, as I said earlier. I think we need to remain open to all future challenges that we may have, and I certainly believe that it is extremely important that we repeal the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act.

I would like to finish with a quote from Jimmy Carter, who was a President of the United States. He said, “Responsible biotechnology is not the enemy, starvation is.” When we look at what is happening in the world, with a growing population that we will need to feed in the future, we have an obligation, bearing in mind that 80 per cent of our farm produce is exported, so we need to wear that as well. I believe this is an important stance to take. We have moved on and the act has served its purpose. It was brought in as a precautionary measure for marketing purposes. Things have moved on since then. We have now proven that we can segregate those products like any other grain and, therefore, I very much support the motion before us today.

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [11.58 am]: I want to correct something that people might be misled by. In the debate held in the chamber this morning there have been attempts to suggest that the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act somehow places a blanket ban on the growing of all GM products in Western Australia; it does not. In fact, I would challenge members on the other side to name one —

Hon Jim Chown: You support the repeal of the act then.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: No, I do not.

Hon Jim Chown interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Shut up!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! I appreciate that Hon Jim Chown has sought the call and he is on the list, but the call has now been given to Hon Ken Travers.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: If Hon Jim Chown sits tight quietly, he will find out what our position is. Let us understand what the situation is. I challenge members on the other side to, when they get the call, name the GM crop that they want to see grown in Western Australia that cannot be grown today under that act, if that is what their government wants to happen. The Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act is an act to prohibit the cultivation of certain genetically modified crops in designated areas of the state and to provide for their destruction in certain cases. There has to be a process under that act to prevent a crop being grown. The act gives the state of Western Australia control over its own destiny. But, no—the toffs on the other side want to tip their hats to Canberra and hand over control and power to Canberra. The repeal of this act is all about members opposite going cap in hand to their Canberra masters and doing their bidding.

Several members interjected.

THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! When the Chair calls for order, it is not an invitation to continue making remarks.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: This legislation enables Western Australia to make its own decisions. We saw this government hand over power to Canberra when it put through the Gene Technology (Western Australia) Bill earlier this year. This government has handed over to Canberra the power to determine what crops can be grown or not grown in Western Australia. This was another way of protecting our marketing.

The Minister for Agriculture and Food says that Co-operative Bulk Handling has got it right with the handling of canola. There is still some debate around that. However, even if we were to accept that, can we be guaranteed that when the next crop is introduced into Western Australia, systems will be in place to protect the Western Australian agricultural industry? We have seen so often Canberra make decisions that are detrimental to

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Western Australia. If the government wants to allow every genetically modified crop that is in the market today to be grown in Western Australia, so be it. The government can do that under the act. But do not take away the right and the power of the state of Western Australia to make its own decisions.

Several members interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The Canberra centralists opposite should be ashamed of themselves! That is what this is all about. It is all about handing over power to Canberra.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! I might give members just a couple of minutes to —

A member interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Yes, to take some oxygen. I think that is a good idea.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Madam Deputy President —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Hon Ken Travers can take a seat. I just want to cool the atmosphere in the chamber a little. This is a very important debate. We have a very long list of speakers and not enough time to hear everyone. So I ask that speakers keep that in mind.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Madam Deputy President, let us not forget the last time the Western Australian Liberal Party and the Western Australian National Party handed over power to Canberra. It was when they signed the goods and services tax agreement. That GST agreement removed Western Australia's power to make decisions about its own revenue sources. That is what the GST agreement did to Western Australia, and look at the great result of that agreement! Yet again today, members opposite are saying, "Let's hand more power to Canberra. Let's dip our hats to our masters on the east coast and hand over power."

Several members interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I can understand why they are squealing. It is because the truth is coming out about their Canberra-centric policies.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Let us try to keep the debate civil. I appreciate that there are very strong views on this issue, but it makes it very difficult for *Hansard* to record the proceedings in *Hansard* when everyone is throwing comments across the chamber.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: That is the situation that we have here. Just as members opposite did with the GST agreement, they now want to hand over more power to Canberra. I am surprised that they have not come in with a bill to abolish the Constitution Act of Western Australia and hand over everything to Canberra. That is what members opposite are seeking to do on this issue, and they are continuing to do it when it comes to funding for the state. There will not be much left to run in Western Australia if these Canberra centralists opposite continue with that type of behaviour.

Hon Jim Chown: The bill has not come before the house.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am not sure what Hon Jim Chown means by saying the bill has not come before the house. I am talking about the motion before the house today, which is to get a bill before the house.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! It would be helpful if Hon Ken Travers did not invite interjections or encourage them.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Madam Deputy President, I thought that by trying to raise my voice and talk over the top of them I was not encouraging interjections.

Let us understand that this government has been talking about bringing in a bill to get rid of the GM legislation. The thing about this government is that it is so incompetent and ineffectual that when it says it is going to do things, they never happen.

I want to make a couple of things very clear. WA Labor supports a moratorium on the growing of GM canola until it is proven to be safe. WA Labor also supports a moratorium on GM canola until we have the legislative framework in place to manage it and give growers in Western Australia a choice as to whether they want to grow GM canola or not grow it.

Hon Paul Brown interjected.

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Hon KEN TRAVERS: Madam Deputy President, I did not invite that interjection, or whatever it was. I want that to be clear.

WA Labor supports the proper labelling of GM products that come into Western Australia. However, the government on the other side does not talk about any of those things. It talks about handing over power to Canberra so that we in Western Australia will have no control.

I speak to a lot of farmers, and everyone gives me a different view. When I was at the Dowerin field days, I had a chat to a number of people in the Liberal Party—people I have a lot of respect for, like Stephen Strange—about GM crops. They told me from their personal perspective why they thought GM crops were good. However, what amazed me was the number of farmers who said to me when I was in Dowerin, “Good on you, because the framework is not in place, the choices are not there, and there is still a whole range of things that we need to do if we want to grow GM crops.” A whole range of farmers said to me that they do not believe that the safety of GM crops has been proven.

It is not just the Labor Party that is saying that the safety of GM crops has not been proven. I remember the good old days. I want to read from an article that I found the other day. The article says in part that there should be —

... an immediate halt to the approval of all GM foods in Australia until independent scientific trials have been completed.

...

... it is up to the other states what they do about GM crops however Western Australia should wait until there is independent information about the performance of GM canola in Australian growing conditions.

The article says also that the policy is —

to support the lifting of the moratorium on non-food products but the party did not support commercial production of GM foods in Western Australia.

Who said that? Was it a Labor Party member? Was it a member of the Greens? No. It was Wendy Duncan, the then president of the National Party. The National Party is the flip-flop party.

Hon Col Holt: We’ve changed our policy! We’re progressive!

Hon KEN TRAVERS: So, they changed their policy to now allow —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon Col Holt: How long ago was that?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It was just before members opposite were elected to government. We should call the National Party members the thongs of the Western Australian Parliament.

Hon Paul Brown interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: We have an open mind. That is why we have a moratorium, not a ban, honourable member. We have a moratorium, not a ban. That is because we have an open mind. When we were in government, we engaged people to undertake longitudinal studies to see whether we can prove that GM canola is safe. I challenge members on the other side to come forward with a study that proves that GM canola is safe.

Several members interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It is better than being in a pair of flip-flops and walking around in the poo in the fields! All right? I am looking forward to the next election, because the poor old Liberal Party will not know which way the flip-flopers will go. Metropolitan members would know that the demand for the better labelling of GM products is very popular in our electorates. The Liberal Party members will have to try to deal with the flip-flopers when it comes to where they will take this debate. This article, which was written just before the last election, when Wendy Duncan was president of the National Party, makes it very clear. I challenge the members of the National Party—who also had a moratorium—to show me the study on which they based the change in their position. Labor did studies, and we will continue to do studies when we are back in government, to look at whether GM canola is safe. We are not Luddites. We are open to the idea of GM canola if it can be proven to be safe. However, there is not a study out there yet to prove that.

Several members interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Madam Deputy President, I am not inviting interjections.

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One of the things we should try to do is get independent studies. We are not Luddites. However, I have to tell members opposite that they sound very similar to the members who used to sit on that side of the house and oppose bans on smoking, or the closure of asbestos mining at Wittenoom. We are saying, as I think Wendy Duncan used to say, that we should adopt the precautionary approach and have a moratorium until GM canola has been proven to be safe. That is not being a Luddite. That is having an open mind, but at the same time being concerned because it has not been proven to be safe.

I will add this final point. As of today, there is a \$55 premium on non-GM canola over GM canola. So, I am not sure that the economics has been proved, and when we get the superweeds in Western Australia, I am not sure it will be there. If the government had wanted to do something to help farmers in Western Australia over the last three years, it could have listened to Hon Nigel Hallett and installed Doppler radar. That would have done more for the economics than anything else.

Hon Paul Brown: We are doing that! That's what we are doing!

Hon KEN TRAVERS: No; the government has taken eight years to do it!

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral) [12.09 pm]: I thank my colleague Hon Paul Brown for bringing this motion to the house today. It has certainly been a lively and interesting debate. It is time, as Hon Mark Lewis said, for emotion to be taken out of this argument and for farmers to be supported in growing the agriculture industry. The future of genetic modification technology is one of the most significant issues facing the Western Australian agricultural sector. I, too, reaffirm my strong support for the repeal of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003 in this place today, and that is an unequivocal statement. The repeal of the law that bans the growth of GM crops in WA must be a key priority for this government and the Minister for Agriculture and Food. Having heard him speak today in support of the repeal of the act, we urge that a bill be brought to the house as soon as possible so that Parliament can debate the issue. Members want to raise numerous points for consideration around the repeal of the act, and it absolutely should be debated so that all members who spoke on today's motion have the opportunity to engage in the debate when the bill comes to the house. It is incredibly important that this issue gains quicker traction in Parliament, because far too much is at stake for Western Australian farmers and the state's agricultural sector for us not to do that.

There is keen support for GM technology, as evidenced by the widespread uptake of GM canola by Western Australian farmers. The Nationals WA strongly supports the sector having the right to exercise choice in deciding whether to access and utilise that technology. This is about allowing farmers to have choice. Maybe there could be a sharing of the market between non-GM and GM crops, and it would be great for farmers to have that choice. Western Australian grain growers should not be required to seek permission from the state government to utilise GM technology, and have to wait for the government to make a decision on the repeal of that act. We need to bring it to Parliament. Our Western Australian farmers deserve more certainty on this issue so that they can continue to use valuable tools that help them be at the top of their game in the agricultural sector and help them move into the future and be more competitive. The repeal of that legislation will also provide companies looking to invest in agricultural research and development in Western Australia with greater certainty and confidence, absent of political interference. That is probably where we are now at from what I hear from every farmer I speak to. Weeks ago my brother was on a boat trip with his friends, a lot of whom are farmers, and they are all waiting for and talking about the repeal of this act, and they want the opportunity to utilise the technology.

In 2010, the then agriculture minister, Terry Redman, took some leadership on this issue that saw the Liberal-National government grant an exemption that allowed Western Australian farmers to grow GM crops commercially in this state. That was an extremely difficult time—it was an extremely tough period for him personally—but as the minister, he took a strong stance, and I think industry is now glad he did, although at the time some sectors of the industry were his greatest critics. That was not that long ago —

Hon Jim Chown: It's been Liberal policy since 2004.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: But the Liberal Party never did it.

Hon Jim Chown: We weren't in government until 2008. It was —

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I look forward to Hon Jim Chown's contribution, now that he is supporting it.

Hon Jim Chown: I am sorry, but —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Jacqui Boyde has the call.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thank you, Madam Deputy President.

Since 2010, WA growers have eagerly adopted that technology, becoming the state growing the largest amount of GM canola in Australia, with Roundup Ready canola comprising approximately 30 per cent of our state's

Hon Paul Brown; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West; Hon Peter Katsambanis

canola crop. That is unsurprising because Western Australian farmers are amongst the most progressive and innovative in the world. The decision of WA growers to utilise GM technology has resulted in clear agronomic and environmental benefits for Australian farmers in a number of ways. Firstly, insects and weeds are a significant cost to the Australian agricultural industry through yield reduction and the cost of control measures for farmers. Weeds alone are estimated to have caused a loss of \$3.9 billion for farmers in Australia from 1998 to 2002. The development of genetically modified, herbicide-tolerant and insect-resistant crop plans as new tools to reduce the negative impacts of insects, pests and weeds on production has undoubtedly improved the sustainability and productivity of Australian agriculture. The development of GM insect-resistant and herbicide-tolerant crops has proven extremely effective in integrated pest and weed management systems in that agricultural chemicals can be managed to minimise the development of chemical resistance and some other unintended impacts, including to non-target species and the environment in particular.

Secondly, beyond weed control, GM technology also has the potential to form part of the solution for farmers managing challenges associated with climate change. We talked about climate change this morning. Promising research into GM crops may help farmers adapt to changing weather. This includes breeding traits to mitigate the effects of drought and frost, and GM crops may also be bred to respond to the effects of climate change such as evolving pest and disease pressures. Further still, the technology could see growers benefit from the development of varieties that deliver healthier oil profiles, increased water and nitrogen efficiency and improved yields. These benefits are likely to result in increased profitability at the farm gate, which only has to be good for farmers. What is good for the economy of farmers is good for Western Australia and the Australian economy in general. That is a good thing and we should support it.

A report released earlier this year by the Australian Grain Institute into agriculture's future increased profitability found that the repeal of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003 would reduce the red tape and regulation that currently inhibits the sector's competitiveness and profitability. The same report also found that industry has demonstrated its ability to self-regulate these issues and to manage coexisting technologies through its supply chains. In addition to the various agronomic gains I mentioned this morning, the Grain Institute also found that future productivity gains from GM crops would outweigh any price premiums received for non-traditional crops.

I am going to run out of time this morning, members, but this is an extremely important issue for farmers and I am glad we have had this debate today. I finish my contribution—I know others want to have a say on this motion—by saying that it is now time for Parliament to repeal that act. Doing that will provide Western Australia's agriculture sector with more certainty about its future, more certainty about its capacity to attract investment, and, most importantly, it will give WA growers a choice. As I said, it is a choice that farmers need in order to move forward in their industry.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I know members are not going to be happy with the call I make. Just for the record, four people on the government side have spoken on this motion and only one person on the opposition benches, so I give the call to Hon Lynn MacLaren.

HON LYNN MacLAREN (South Metropolitan) [12.18 pm]: I will only take a couple of minutes, so other members will be able to make their comments. It should come as no surprise that we oppose this motion, but the fact is that some farmers do not want to grow genetically modified crops. It is true that we need to update our genetically modified laws, but I do not think we should repeal the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003 until we set in place a law that protects farmers who do not want to grow GM crops. The judges made a split decision in the recent March versus Baxter court case, but the proof was that even at the highest levels of law, the GM debate is still unsettled. It shows that in spite of what the minister said in answer to my question the other day, the common law will never be able to help farmers who find themselves the victims of GM contamination. It is true that Western Australia has a good reputation as a clean and green, non-GM producer. I would not want to risk that reputation by loosening any control that we might already have. Rather than weakening farmer protection, we really should be strengthening it. We need to have confidence in investment and development in agriculture by strengthening our regulations around genetically modified organisms. I point to the Hastings District Council, which has become the first official genetically modified-free food producing zone in New Zealand. It said that it reinforces the view that Hawkes Bay's economic prosperity lies with premium and GE-free exports. It also adds to the image of Hawkes Bay as uniquely pure and clean and will definitely add value to its products. The move in New Zealand is seen as a major economic opportunity. That is the other side of the GM debate here. The Greens remain opposed to repealing the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003.

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.21 pm]: I have about three minutes, so I will be very brief and reserve my comments on this very important debate pertaining to my electorate until the near future when the minister introduces a bill to repeal the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003. I also

Extract from Hansard

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p6540b-6549a

Hon Paul Brown; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West; Hon Peter Katsambanis

congratulate Hon Paul Brown for bringing forward this preliminary motion for a debate that will take place at some stage in the future. Repealing the act will actually back up what the former member for Moore, Mr Gary Snook, launched for the Liberal Party at Dowerin Field Days in 2004. That Liberal policy was for GM crops. I will close by saying that as Hon Ken Travers quite correctly said, in 2008 our Nationals colleagues were not too sure about GM, but I am happy to say that they are now fully on board and will support the repeal of the legislation. Might I also add that my electorate, the Agricultural Region, is fundamentally reliant on agriculture. We have adopted every technology available to us and made them conform to our requirements because we are dry-land farmers in a very dry climate. It is my firm belief that GMs are the next thing to take us forward in production. It will not only take us forward in production, but also fulfil the requirements of a world that needs at least a 70 per cent lift in food production to ensure that human beings have adequate food supplies as the population grows to between nine billion and 9.5 billion by the turn of the century. I am sure Hon Darren West wants to have two minutes so that we can have a further shot at him when the legislation is repealed.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural) [12.23 pm]: I note the spirit in which the debate has been held, with members keeping their comments brief so that we can all have a say, and I will do the same. I have some empathy with the Attorney General, who had to sit here yesterday and listen to a farmer lecture him about what was wrong with his legislation. I have had to sit here today and listen to city-based members of Parliament lecture me about what is best for farmers. GM crops are nowhere near the biggest issue facing agriculture at the moment. It may seem that way because of the tone of this debate, but agriculture is facing much bigger challenges. We are facing the greatest challenge with climate change. In June and July, we had no rain on our farm for eight weeks. Each year the frosts are coming later and there are extended dry winter periods of rainfall, which is making our terms of trade extremely difficult.

Hon Paul Brown interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: I do not have time for interjections. I make the point that there are significantly greater issues facing agriculture. We are losing our young people and our population, our terms of trade are diminishing and our input costs are rising exponentially. However, none of these problems will be solved with the introduction of GM crops. Yes, I see there is a philosophical difference, but consumers are not convinced. Only one in four farmers is choosing to adopt this. Let us not make it a bigger issue than it is. It is an issue, but certainly not the biggest issue facing agriculture.

HON PETER KATSAMBANIS (North Metropolitan) [12.24 pm]: I will be brief. I commend Hon Paul Brown for bringing this motion before the house. I fully support it. I may be a metropolitan member, but I want this state to thrive and prosper. I want this state to have the best opportunity to maximise its natural advantages, including agriculture. It would be wrong to shut our state to emerging technology that will increase yields, protect farmers and assist them in a competitive global environment, which is why I commend the repeal of the act.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.