

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD — GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

3455. Hon Lynn MacLaren to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

- (1) I refer to the recent updates to the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA) website, that states that “DAFWA is part of the nationally consistent regulatory system that underpins and enhances Australia’s and Western Australia’s use of safe regulatory approved genetically modified organisms”, and I ask:
 - (a) will the Government upgrade and extend the State’s *Gene Technology Act 2006*, to renew its commitment to “the nationally consistent regulatory systems” on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO);
 - (b) if the Government repealed the *Gene Technology Act 2006*, what legislative instrument would it use to remain part of the nationally consistent regulatory system on GMO; and
 - (c) does the *Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003* enhance the State’s powers granted by policy principles made under section 21 of the *Gene Technology Act 2000* to recognise areas, if any, designated under State law for the purpose of preserving the identity of one or both of the following for marketing purposes:
 - (i) GM crops; and
 - (ii) Non-GM crops?
- (2) I refer to the recent update to DAFWA’s website, that states that “the New Genes for New Environments’ initiative compliments the Managed Environment Facility and together both facilities will improve the long-term profitability of the grains industry by facilitating the adoption of new climate-adapted crops”, and I ask:
 - (a) will the Minister provide hard evidence to back up this statement, including:
 - (i) costs;
 - (ii) progress to date; and
 - (iii) expected time to commercial availability?

Hon Ken Baston replied:

- (1) (a–b) The Government has introduced the *Gene Technology Bill 2015* to replace the existing Western Australian *Gene Technology Act 2006* with a new Act, applying the Commonwealth *Gene Technology Act 2000* as a law of the State. This will ensure that the regulatory system is and remains consistent across Australia.
 - (c) Section 21 of the *Gene Technology Act 2000* does not grant the State any powers. It allows the Ministerial Council (now the Legislative and Governance Forum) to make policy principles recognising areas designated under State laws as GM free. The State has the power to make these laws regardless of this provision, not because of it. The *Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act 2003* does not enhance these powers, it is an exercise of them.
- (2) (a) (i) The Government allocated \$9 million to New Genes for New Environments (NGNE) facilities. The Managed Environment Facility (MEF) has been a joint investment between the Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia (DAFWA) and the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC). From 2009–10 through to 2014–15 seasons, the two partners have invested \$2.46 million and \$5.35 million, respectively.
 - (ii) The NGNE Facilities has conducted trials on wheat and barley with altered grain composition and/or nutrient utilisation, and wheat and barley modified for tolerance to abiotic stress tolerance and/or micronutrient uptake.

Since 2010 the MEF has been conducting benchmarking trials aimed at characterising elite wheat germplasm for adaptive physiological and agronomic traits required in water limited or drought-prone environments. Likewise, CSIRO has been testing diverse genetic material such as isogenic lines for plant height, early vigour, later grain filling, maintenance of green leaf area and transpiration efficiency that could potentially be used as parents in plant breeding programs and understanding of the key adaptation traits in Western Australia.

- (iii) The NGNE facilities have operated to provide a contained testing environment for third parties. Commercialisation decisions on tested material rest with those third parties.

The information and knowledge generated at MEF is available to breeding companies in Australia. Use of identified parents as sources of stress tolerance in breeding program and the commercialisation decision of the resulting varieties rest with breeding companies.