

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CANOLA — HEALTH OUTCOMES

516. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I refer to the minister's admission in this place on 3 May that he did not know whether genetically modified canola from the Barnett government's GM trials was sold to Riverland Oilseeds in Pinjarra or whether meal made with that GM canola was fed to animals and poultry and then made its way into the WA food chain.

- (1) What has the minister done to satisfy himself that there are no harmful effects for Western Australian consumers from genetically modified crops being fed to animals and then entering the WA food chain?
- (2) Has the minister sought legal advice as to whether his decision to allow GM canola to enter the WA food chain could make the WA government legally responsible if a link between genetically modified food and negative health outcomes is proven in the future?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

I thank the member for Warnbro for the question.

- (1)–(2) The member for Warnbro made the point that, from his perspective, he believes that I need to have an understanding or a sign-off or an acknowledgment of the pathway for every single tonne of grain that gets delivered or transported anywhere in Western Australia. What is happening in the case of GM canola or GM cotton or all those other grains that are legal to grow and sell in Western Australia is that the market sells it where it can find a buyer. The member is intimating that I should somehow be involved in or be informed about the shifting or transport of any of that grain; I am not. What the producers of Western Australia are allowed to grow and sell includes GM canola, and they are legally entitled to do it. The relevant authorisation or regulatory authority that manages the allowing of the growing of any GM product—or any GM event for that matter—in Western Australia is the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator at a federal level; if it is a food crop, it is Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

I put this point to the member for Warnbro: the implication of what the member for Warnbro is saying here is that there is somehow a relationship between —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: — GM canola or GM canola meal, which is what is left over after the oil has been pressed out, going into feedstock and being fed to animals, and then those animals finish up on someone's plate. That is exactly what happens in Europe; Europe purchases considerable amounts of GM soy meal, it goes into their feedstock and it goes into the animals that people in Europe consume. It is nothing different from what is happening in other parts of the world.

I put to the member for Warnbro that a note came past my desk a week or so ago, I think, and it was a point for noting because I think I am the minister responsible for the Gene Technology Act that sort of shadows the federal act. That came past my desk to say, "Please be aware we are going to be trialling in Western Australia a GM vaccine that could well solve prostate cancer in men." Am I to take it that the member for Warnbro, or indeed the Leader of the Opposition—who openly in his response to the budget this year said he supports biotechnology, research in agriculture and a whole range of research options as one of the platforms the Labor Party is taking to this next election—is asking this side of the house, the state government of Western Australia, to say that it does not support a GM vaccine being trialled in Western Australia that could potentially be a solution to prostate cancer in men?

Several members interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: This one is even in an injectable form.

Point of Order

Mr P. PAPALIA: I asked two very clear questions: what has the minister done to satisfy himself that there is no harmful effect —

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order, member?

Mr P. PAPALIA: My point of order is that the minister is not responding to the question; he is pursuing his notes he was provided in the hope that no-one will notice, and you should draw him to answering the question.

The SPEAKER: I will give you the opportunity, member, to ask a supplementary question if you want to ask a supplementary.