

GENETICALLY MODIFIED WHEAT — TRIALS

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

I refer to today's peer-reviewed report by eminent molecular biologist Professor Heinemann from the University of Canterbury warning that genetically modified wheat may cause glycogen storage disease iv, resulting in an enlarged liver, cirrhosis of the liver and failure to thrive. Noting that children born with this disease usually die at about the age of five, I ask —

(1) Has this strain of wheat been grown in field trials in WA at any time as part of the GM wheat trials —

Mr P.T. Miles interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo, I think you might have been listening before when I indicated to members in this place that if they interrupted a member on his or her feet asking a question, I would formally call them to order. I formally call you to order for the first time today.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I ask —

- (1) Has this strain of GM wheat been grown in field trials in Western Australia at any time as part of the GM wheat trials reported to this house by the Minister for Agriculture and Food in September, October and November of 2011?
- (2) Can the minister guarantee that GM wheat will not enter the Western Australian food chain?
- (3) Is it true that the CSIRO health trials to which the minister referred on radio 6PR this morning are focused solely on the nutritional value of the GM wheat and do not study or consider potential health risks like glycogen storage disease?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

(1)–(3) I thought the member might have got enough of this, but to answer some of the specifics of the question, I am absolutely not aware of this particular variety that has been referred to in today's *The West Australian* being grown in Western Australia. It is my understanding that the trials are on the east coast. In the two facilities that we have that are Office of the Gene Technology Regulator-compliant—one at Merredin and one at Katanning—there has been no application to have the trials in there.

Mr P. Papalia: That is not true. OGTR issued a licence in March for that trial in Merredin.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The particular variety that has been cited in *The West Australian* today, which the member is referring to, has not had applications for trials here in Western Australia, which we would need to approve to go on those particular sites.

The member's question referred to other trials by CSIRO that had been occurring in Merredin. I talked about that, and those are other varieties that have been trialled there. It is exactly the same as what happened under the member's watch in 2006 when there were trials of wheat varieties in Corrigin for salt tolerance. That was something that the member allowed to happen and presumably accepted to happen. In fact, Western Australia has no formal decision-making role other than approval for it to go into those facilities for trials to happen over here. The only role that we have is when there is an exemption order required for commercially grown products. These are not commercially grown; these are trials that are part of a scientific process to prove up whether it is something they want to pursue to a commercial level.

I accept that we have strong regulatory processes in Australia that assess the merits of whether these are things that they want to pursue and get to a commercial level. The member for Warnbro supported trials back in 2006. As I understand it, the ones cited in *The West Australian* today are not trialled in Western Australia; they are trialled on the east coast by CSIRO, which is one of the most pre-eminent scientific organisations in the world. The member also went on to mention the assurances about whether trials finished in the food chain. The whole reason for building Office of the Gene Technology Regulator-compliant facilities here is to ensure the trial meets the standards required, which it does; it has been signed off by the OGTR. Hence we have been able to have GM trials in Western Australia.

Mr P. Papalia: Can you answer the question: do you guarantee that the GM wheat will not enter the food chain in Western Australia?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The thing I can guarantee is the same as the guarantees the member for Warnbro's government gave when it allowed trials in 2006: the trials here meet the standards of the appropriate regulatory bodies at a federal level. It is the federal government's jurisdiction; it is not our jurisdiction. I can guarantee that the trials we have had in Western Australia meet the OGTR standards set at a federal level to allow the trials to happen here. Let us bear in mind that these are scientific trials that happen all the time on a range of levels. It seems that the opposition is hung up on putting in place whatever barriers it can to science and innovation in

Western Australia, despite the Leader of the Opposition laying out his plan for the opposition as an alternative government and using biotechnology and agricultural research in the same sentence. The Leader of the Opposition is being knocked on the head by the member for Warnbro with his position of scaremongering Western Australians about what is a scientific process following all the appropriate regulatory standards that are in place.