

GM Crop regulations

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Genetically Modified Crops Management Regulations (Postponement of Expiry) Bill

Second Reading

Adjourned debate on second reading (resumed on motion).

Mr TRELOAR (Flinders) (16:54): I rise to speak to this bill, the genetically-modified crops extension of moratorium bill, which was introduced by Mark Parnell in the other place. Certainly it seems that, given the support of the government, this bill will actually go through. I think it is unfortunate that that is happening. I am going to declare an interest here. For more than 30 years, I was a grain grower and I still have an interest in a property on Eyre Peninsula. As most people know, I do not have an active role in the day-to-day running of the operation, but certainly I am still registered as a grain grower.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: And you worry about the rain—

Mr TRELOAR: I do worry about the rain and the rain that is coming—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: —this week.

Mr TRELOAR: —at the end of this week. We have already had one big splash, so fingers crossed that it does not come as forecast because, if it does, it will do some damage to this year's crop. Deputy Speaker, you are quite right.

The effect of this bill would be to extend the current GM moratorium from September 2019 to September 2025. I need to make it clear here and now that the Liberal opposition did actually support and do support the moratorium to be in place until September 2019, but we believe that it needs to be reviewed appropriately and comprehensively at that time before a decision is made as to what is done with the moratorium.

In 2004, South Australia, along with other states, introduced a moratorium on genetically-modified crops. Since then, other states have gradually lifted their restrictions. In Victoria, for example, commercial cultivation of GM canola has been permitted since 2008. The member for Hammond talked about other crops, particularly GM cotton (or Bt cotton), which is grown in New South Wales and Queensland where the advantage really is a much reduced amount of pesticide and herbicide that is used on those crops—a great benefit to the environment.

South Australia is the only mainland state to maintain a GM-free zone throughout the country. The government claims this is necessary to maintain South Australia's clean, green marketing advantage; however, in our opinion, it has failed to produce evidence to support this position. In fact, I sourced some research that had been done by

Mercado and they have come up with some figures that show the exact opposite. They show that the South Australian grain trade and other goods trade at a discount to other states. This is done over a period of time and indicates a long-term average.

For example, in wheat, Port Adelaide trades at a 3 per cent discount to Geelong. Port Adelaide trades at a 6 per cent discount to Kwinana in Western Australia. For feed barley, Adelaide trades at a 5 per cent discount to Geelong and Port Adelaide trades at a 7 per cent discount to Kwinana. For non-GM canola, Adelaide trades at a 2 per cent discount to Geelong. Adelaide trades at a 3 per cent discount to Kwinana.

For cattle, trade steers traded at a 8.3 per cent discount in South Australia versus Victoria, and mutton and lamb are the same. Regarding wine grapes, the discount in 2017 for South Australian grapes was \$240 a tonne against Western Australia. Both states have GM crops growing in close proximity, so the evidence is contrary to what the government is claiming. We certainly stick by our position that we would look to review the policy in 2019.

I am going to quote a good friend of mine who farms in Essex in East Anglia. I stayed with this gentleman back in 2002 and have remained in contact with him. His name is Guy Smith. He officially farms the driest farm in the UK. In 19-inch rainfall, he grows wheat, barley, canola and—

The Hon. T.R. Kenyon: He probably has three times your rainfall, has he?

Mr TRELOAR: No, 19 inches, so very similar actually, Tom, to where we farm. Incredibly, funnily enough, he grows exactly the same crops: wheat, barley, canola and beans. He grows to the acre about what we do to the hectare, as a rough rule of thumb, so it is highly productive. Guy is currently a vice president of the National Farmers Union (NFU) in the UK. At the moment, they are debating the reauthorisation of glyphosate. To Australian farmers, that seems an extraordinary discussion to even be contemplating. In my humble opinion, glyphosate has had the single biggest impact on Australian and world agriculture since the introduction of the traction engine, the tractor. There is no doubt in my mind that that is true. Guy Smith says:

When politicians and administrators stop listening to the authorities charged with scientific evaluation, you get bad regulation.

And that is exactly what is going to happen. I am also going to give another quote, and I have been thinking about this for some time. Charles Darwin said: 'In the long history of humankind...those who learned to...improvise most effectively have prevailed.' And agriculture throughout its history has improvised.

Turnip Townshend and Jethro Tull oversaw the agricultural revolution in the UK in the early 18th century. Turnip Townshend, of course, introduced crop rotation and Jethro Tull developed a seed drill in 1700. He developed a horse-drawn hoe. He developed a mechanical winnower and was roundly ostracised by going against the will of God, and there is a sense of this in this debate, I believe. In South Australia, the Ridley stripper was invented in 1842. Superphosphate was applied to soils. The Correll brothers on Yorke Peninsula developed a seed drill that can sow grain and superphosphate, phosphorous, at the same time.

There has been motorised mechanisation and the introduction of the tractor. In South Australia we were the world leaders in the development of ley farming. In fact, much of that technology was exported. I remember our own department of agriculture sending scientists overseas in the 1970s, particularly to the Middle East to places like Libya and Iraq, to take the technology that had been developed here in South Australia to the rest of the world. It was very successful.

In my time, we saw the introduction of agricultural chemicals, including glyphosate, which I have already mentioned, which allowed farmers to establish their crop with much less work and effort with incredible benefits to soil health. We have seen high analysis fertilisers. Of late, we have seen GPS technology and variable rate technology impact on our machines and the way we farm. They are extraordinary developments. My own father talks about hydraulics, cabs on tractors, the bulk handling of grain. My maternal grandfather said, 'There is no way I am going to go to bulk handling of grain.' Well, of course, he did because it was easier.

My point is that the rate of the uptake of new technology by South Australian and Australian farmers generally has been extraordinary because they see the advantage—until now. Now what we are seeing in this state is the adoption of groundbreaking technology grind to a halt. I believe that the government has overstepped the mark on this one. It is not for government to dictate to farmers what they can and cannot grow. They are dictating to private businesses economic decisions. It smacks of the Eastern Bloc and old Soviet Russia, governments dictating to farmers what they can and cannot grow.

The government says the premiums are real but, as I pointed out, they are not. It is about being competitive and growers producing commodities that are traded on the world market. Our products are commodities—10 million tonnes last year. That is a lot of grain. If we are not competitive, the risk is that we will become irrelevant and may even disappear. Ain't that the truth? It seems to be habit forming in the state. Engineering is not a silver bullet. It would only ever be another tool in the toolbox. It is not as though all would embrace it. No farming system is perfect, but it would give our growers an opportunity they currently do not have. Shame on the government for not allowing it.

Mark Parnell in the other place talks about letting the genie out of the bottle. There is nothing magical about this. This is not magic; this is actually science. It is based on science. Do not be fearful of the future or the science itself: embrace it. The member for Hammond talked a lot about the rest of the world embracing it, and the member for Colton also talked about the rest of the world embracing gene technology, asking why we should follow suit. My real fear is that if we do not, we will become uncompetitive.

Gene editing is just around the corner. Work has been done and much has been said about it. Gene editing is where DNA is inserted, deleted or replaced in the genome. It is incredibly exciting technology. Are we going to be precluded from that technology? Is the government going to allow access to that, or are we simply going to continue cycling about with a stick of bread and a bottle of pinot in a basket? There has been a lack of consultation, a lack of formal data and, unfortunately, it removes choice from growers and caps our potential.

Particularly, I would look to Grain Producers SA. They are the peak representational body in this industry and the government needs to look at the lobbying and the input they are having into this debate. I think it is a big mistake to extend this moratorium without any due diligence, and I think that is the key. We really need to investigate the benefits, or otherwise, that this is giving to marketing and also our farming and production systems. It appears to me to be anti-science, anti-competition and anti-choice.

The Hon. L.W.K. BIGNELL (Mawson—Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, Minister for Forests, Minister for Tourism, Minister for Recreation and Sport, Minister for Racing) (17:05): I will pick up on the point that the member for Flinders made that you take away the right of people to have their choice. If you bring in GM crops, you take away the choice of all these wonderful producers and food manufacturers that we have. You take away the choice for those people, you take away the choice for those people to market—

Mr Treloar interjecting:

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. L.W.K. BIGNELL: —their food as GM free. Let's have a look at some of the globally recognised—

Mr Treloar interjecting:

The Hon. L.W.K. BIGNELL: Excuse me. I sat here in silence.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order on my left! The member is entitled to be heard in silence.

Committee Stage

In committee.

Mr TRELOAR: I have a question on clause 1 as well. It relates to something I touched on in my second reading contribution around gene editing. Gene editing is when DNA is inserted, deleted or replaced in the genome. It is the next tranche of technology, if you like. Will plants that have been developed under a gene-editing regime be allowed to be grown under the extended moratorium?

The Hon. L.W.K. BIGNELL: The definition will be picked up from the commonwealth legislation, so that is where that will be decided.