



**GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS MANAGEMENT BILL**  
**29 March 2004**

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** In October 2001, I spoke in this house and supported a five year moratorium on the introduction of GMO crops on Eyre Peninsula. What I said then is still relevant now. However, since then we have had the select committee on genetically modified organisms and there has been considerable public discussion about the pros and cons of growing GMO products. Most of the farmers contacting my office were firm in the belief that it was still too soon to grow GMO grain on the Eyre Peninsula, and I asked that the committee recommend that Eyre Peninsula remain GMO free, along with Kangaroo Island, to enable further time for our farmers to consider the implications. Just some of the perceived negatives that regularly came up in discussions were: firstly, there was a major concern about market acceptance of GMO products; and, secondly, who will be responsible if we have a problem with super weeds, plants which could well be former crops spread for their tolerance to herbicides. Then there was a concern about multinational companies that might get control of the seeds by way of patents and put the price up in a similar way to what we have seen with medicines.

Also of concern was that the multinationals could sue if their seed was used accidentally in some way in a paddock and a small farmer would be no match in the courts. There was concern about the cost and difficulty of segregation of crops and seed to ensure contamination did not occur. Who should pay for segregation and who would pay if segregation was not effective and contamination did occur?

Finally, people are most concerned about any cross species modification of genes; that is, for example, the one that has been spoken about tonight, namely, pig genes in tomatoes. Then there were those farmers who more recently have come forward expressing great concern that Eyre Peninsula could be left behind if our farmers could not take advantage of the advances in GMO technologies; and that the benefits of seeds with salt tolerance, drought tolerance, pest resistance and with tolerance to weeds, sprays and vitamin enhanced would not be available to them.

When the bill was tabled with the three year pause for the state and with Kangaroo Island and Eyre Peninsula being exempt from GMO, I did not have a problem. However, since then, the difficulty of getting out of this exemption, if in three years time the growers on Eyre Peninsula decide that they want to grow GMO products, has caused me to decide that it would be better for the Eyre Peninsula to stay with the rest of the state.

By 2007, the five year GMO free undertaking for Eyre Peninsula that I gave in 2001 will have been more than fulfilled. Then in three years' time, the decision can be made, along with the rest of the state, as to whether or not the region will go for GMO. I would hope that Eyre Peninsula will still be considered as a distinct region for the purposes of opting out at that time should they wish. The Eyre Regional Development Board has already begun to consult with farmers in the region through a series of meetings, and I would hope that these will help to clarify the issues for farmers and that the right decision is made when the time comes.

I am concerned that even if undertakings are made now in good faith by the current independent minister that enable the farmers to decide the route they wish to take, if a Liberal government should not be in power, we could have a real Labor minister in three years' time who could cause difficulties that I have not foreseen. It could be possible that in three years, despite farmers wanting to grow GMO plants, the situation could be manipulated by a Labor minister to stop this from happening for political reasons, probably to pander to green groups. As a remote region that produces in a good year about 40 per cent of the state's grain, we cannot afford not to get the best price available for our product and have the advantage of growing as much as we can.

We have a world-class centre for dryland farming at Minnipa research station that must have a say in the future for the region where it is based. However, what is best for Eyre Peninsula must ultimately be decided by the

farmers on Eyre Peninsula, not by the people who have no real understanding of farming in our region. I believe it will probably come down to individual products being given approval one by one as they become available, having been tested and approved and segregation matters ironed out. I support the pause and will support an amendment to have Eyre Peninsula included with the rest of the state for the next three years.

## **GENE TECHNOLOGY BILL**

**31 October 2001**

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** I support the passage of this bill as a necessary component of the legislation that will put in place the national cooperative regulatory scheme for genetically modified organisms (GMOs). It is absolutely essential that standard legislation for GMOs applies across Australia. Gene technology is a science that is breaking new ground, with many outcomes still unknown and untried. Gene technology combines a minefield with a rose garden. There are so many possibilities that have to be explored for us to be confident that we are deactivating the mines and leaving only the roses.

Some of the dangers in an emerging science such as this come from the increasing speed of change and the pace with which that change is adopted. In past history, change took years, sometimes centuries, to become commonplace, so disadvantages and problems could be effectively dealt with along the way. Appropriate legislation now becomes the protection to the community and the environment that time afforded in past ages.

Over many years, changes in plants have been considerable, but they have occurred by natural selection and selective breeding. With genetic modification, it is now possible to change plants quickly with potentially unknown consequences. For example, non-GMO plants can be contaminated by GMO genes or crops could be invaded by GMO plants. New plants produced can be patented and owned by one entity, and those who own the patents could hold buyers to ransom by making it non viable not to have their seed but expensive to have it. It will be up to the Gene Technology Regulator to decide on potential risks to public health.

However, from a purely marketing point of view, there are obvious risks that must be taken into account by those people intending to grow these products. Optimising the price received for the products from Eyre Peninsula is particularly important because of our added fixed costs. Freight is high to and from the area and, in addition, very little of the value adding is done locally, even though 65 per cent of the state's fishing income and around 40 per cent of the state's grain income comes from there. Premium prices may be available for GMO-free products, and discounted prices could be the result of having GMOs and losing our clean green image.

I commend the minister for signalling his intention to ask the Gene Technology Ministerial Council to establish the policy principle that recognises GM crop restricted areas. While delving into the uncharted waters surrounding gene technology, it is absolutely essential that GMO-free areas are not only able to be established but also can be established with integrity. It is for this reason that I support a five-year moratorium on the introduction of GMO crops on Eyre Peninsula. Eyre Peninsula is well sited for such action. We are virtually a triangular island, bounded on two sides by sea and on the third side by station country which supports almost no horticultural activity. Crops and stock can therefore be isolated from the accidental or deliberate contamination by genetically modified species of living organisms.

A great deal of opposition to genetic modification exists among our major world markets. Because this state, and Eyre Peninsula in particular, are prolific exporters into these world markets, we must heed this opposition to ensure the successful continued marketing of our produce. This alone makes the provision of GM crop restricted areas an imperative. Those who are not closely involved in primary industry may be unaware of the overlapping effects of what at first appear unrelated industries. For example, a field crop in Central Eyre Peninsula appears to bear no relation to the farmed tuna, yellow tail kingfish and black bream, yet the link is definite and short.

Tuna farming was pioneered by Port Lincoln fishermen. Now that it has been shown that wild fish can be farmed to grow into a bigger and more marketable product, and bring better returns, attention has turned to the feeding of the tuna and other species. The research to develop an artificial feed has been going on now for a few years, with success on a broad scale being tantalisingly close to reality. A variety of feeds has been trialled, some using grain as a component.

The majority of the local blue fin tuna is marketed in Japan, where strong opposition to GMOs has been

expressed. It is important to use only non-GMO products in the development of artificial feeds if the Japanese market is to be retained. There may be no risk to humans at all; however, in marketing perception is everything, and to lose our current clean green image could lose not only the tuna market.

Farmed abalone is another industry pioneered by Port Lincoln fishermen. Again, artificial feeds, in which grain is a component, are being used. Some of these feeds are already being produced at Cummins on Central Eyre Peninsula. The same points about market desirability mentioned for the tuna industry also apply to the abalone industry.

Port Lincoln is fortunate to have the last tuna cannery in Australia: John West products are canned there and sold around the world. On a recent visit, Gary West advised that they will not be using any GMO canola oil in any of their products. Again, we could lose a major market this time for the canola that we are producing so well on Eyre Peninsula. A crushing plant on Eyre Peninsula for this niche market could provide premium prices for our farmers and justify the purchase of the plant itself. Such niche markets will be available in other products that we can exploit by being GMO free.

This bill is a necessary step in putting in place appropriate legislation across Australia in the realm of gene technology. It will also provide for Eyre Peninsula people the opportunity to have a moratorium for five years should they wish to do so. This will give time for them to assess the potential, advantages and disadvantages of GMO products being grown on Eyre Peninsula. I support the bill.