



Greens, Labor fail to ban canola plantings

By COLIN BETTLES

ANOTHER disallowance motion designed to prevent Genetically Modified (GM) canola being grown in WA, was defeated in State Parliament last week.

The defeat will ensure the controversial crop can now be produced commercially for the first time in WA this season, without further threat of political disruption; at least for the time being.

The Greens and Labor put forward the Legislative Council motion but it was eventually beaten 19 against to 14 for, drawing strong criticism in the process.

On March 10, Shadow Agriculture Minister Mick Murray proposed a disallowance motion in the Lower House but it was eventually dismissed 26 to 24.

The Lower House vote came after a day of political jostling and a fiery three hour debate that saw Liberal members threatening to cross the floor and vote with Labor and the Greens.

In April 2009, a similar disallowance motion was proposed in the outgoing Upper House, against an exemption order to the GM Crops Free Areas Act, to block last year's large scale GM canola trials.

The disallowance motion was raised by Greens South West MLC Paul Llewellyn, while outgoing Agricultural Region MLC Anthony Fels was central to the mini-controversy, which arrived on the eve of parliament taking a three week break.

The Greens and Labor combined with Mr Fels to win the vote 14 to 13, in favour of the disallowance motion.

It temporarily aborted the GM

canola trials, but Agriculture and Food Minister Terry Redman moved quickly to give the industry and the participating growers more certainty, reinstating the exemption order on the same day it was disallowed.

Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis spoke against the latest disallowance motion raised by the Greens member Giz Watson, which produced another healthy debate.

Mr Ellis issued a media statement afterwards, saying he was disappointed that valuable parliamentary time was still being taken up, debating an issue already dealt with at length on numerous occasions in the Upper House.

"Farmers can now commercially grow GM canola, GM canola is already in the ground and the majority of farmers want to have the option of growing GM canola – so in canola farmers' jargon the disallowance motion was like spraying hot air post-emergent," Mr Ellis said.

Mr Ellis said one of the reasons so many "GM myths" had been perpetuated in WA was that the Agriculture and Food Department had no fact sheets available on its website during the term of the previous government.

He urged anybody with an open mind to do some myth-busting by going to the department's website for fact sheets, such as Misconceptions about GM Technology, which clarifies issues like cross-pollination, gene transfer and accidental contamination.

Mr Ellis said he hoped the latest GM disallowance motion would be the last and that canola growers in WA could get on with making an informed commercial choice about

whether or not to grow genetically modified crops.

Network of Concerned Farmers spokesperson Julie Newman said she was disappointed the latest disallowance motion was defeated.

Ms Newman said she was also concerned Agriculture and Food Minister Terry Redman had convinced Parliament that co-existence was possible between GM canola and non-GM canola, but she believed it was not.

"We need the ability to market as non-GM canola but how can we provide that guarantee when we know that contamination will occur," she said.

Ms Newman also said Mr Redman had agreed to several conditions when the disallowance motion was defeated in the Lower House in March, to help get the vote up, but those conditions were not possible.

In particular, she said legal implications prevented the State Government from keeping a register of GM growers.

Also, she was concerned Monsanto would charge non-GM farmers for any unintended contamination of their canola crops, when delivering it to CBH.

Mr Redman's office said at no stage did the Minister say he would implement a compulsory register of GM growers.

"The department is working with the technology provider to provide a level of information that effectively informs the public about where and how much GM canola will be grown in WA this growing season, while respecting farmers' rights to privacy," a statement from Mr Redman's office said.



□ Greens North Metropolitan MLC Giz Watson



□ Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis



□ Former Agricultural region MLC Anthony Fels



□ Agriculture and Food Minister Terry Redman