

press clip

Barnett backs GM canola production

By COLIN BETTLES

WA Premier Colin Barnett wants to see Genetically Modified (GM) canola produced in WA, and personally supports its implementation.

Mr Barnett said the Government would adopt a cautious, scientific approach to the decision-making processes that will determine GM technology's future in WA.

However, he is unable to confirm if the crop will be introduced next season, despite promising against delays.

The GM Crops Free Areas Act 2003 is currently being reviewed, with the deadline for final submissions passing on September 11.

A report of the review is due to be presented to both Houses of the WA Parliament by December 24, and handed to the Agriculture and Food Minister Terry Redman, who will also play a key role in determining timing.

A final decision on GM canola in WA could be made when State Parliament resits next January.

Mr Barnett said the Liberal-National State Government remained committed to its election promise on GM's.

"I don't think we are a Government that delays; we get on with it," he said.

"We will look at that advice (GM Crops Free Areas Act review) and consider it very carefully.

"There will be contrary points of view and I guess from what I'm hearing just now, the farming community broadly, is going to be strongly in support of GM canola and again we have to reassure the public.

"The public has to feel comfortable, if that decision is taken, that it's the right decision."

The Premier was speaking to rural media during a special trip within the WA Wheatbelt last week.

He was joined on the tour by Agricultural Region MLC's, Jim

Chown and Brian Ellis, who are both experienced grain farmers from WA's northern Wheatbelt.

The Liberal politicians visited the GM trial of York farmer Charlie Boyle.

Mr Boyle is growing 60 hectares of Roundup Ready canola this season, as part of a large-scale commercial trial, which involves 17 growers under an exemption to the GM Crops Free Areas Act 2003.

With the Act currently under review, Mr Barnett heard more compelling evidence from the coal-face, that WA growers want the Government to give them the choice to grow GMs on their farms next season and beyond.

Mr Boyle and fellow GM canola grower John Snooke, Meckering, told Mr Barnett WA graingrowers wanted to see the future of GM canola improved, but also WA "opened for business" for other cropping biotechnology that can generate frost and salt tolerant traits for wheat.

Mr Barnett said the Government would proceed cautiously with the Government's review of GMs and allow science, not emotion, to guide its decision making.

"We made that commitment at the election campaign," he said.

"The first thing will be once these 17 trials are complete, there will be a proper scientific evaluation and then we will make a decision.

"At the moment we have only committed to cotton in the Kimberley and GM canola.

"However, we will be careful in what we do because I recognise there's a range of attitudes; maybe not so much in the farming community but across the general community.

"But, I would expect we would see GM canola being allowed in WA."

Mr Barnett said Mr Redman would answer questions on the tim-

ing of the decision and when the report would be presented to Parliament.

The Premier said he was also impressed by the progress of Mr Boyle's crop this season.

"I'm not a farmer but from my lay position it looks very healthy," he said.

"I'm surprised by how thick it is and obviously it is going to be a very productive crop.

"What I have seen from this variety, it basically has more pods forming on it, but the major benefit as we have been hearing, is the reduced application of pesticides and herbicides for weed control.

"It has a big saving environmentally and there's a big saving in terms of the cost of production."

Despite the environmental benefits of GMs, the crop continues to attract the attention of Green Peace and other oppositional groups.

When asked if he found it hard to understand why Green Peace was opposed to GM crops, considering their environmental benefits, Mr Barnett said some of the arguments (against it) were philosophical.

"It's a bit like the uranium debate," he said.

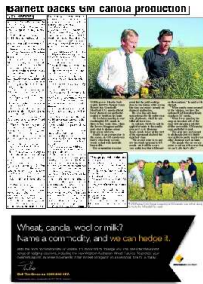
"Some people think uranium and nuclear power is fine and others have a philosophical objection to it.

"I understand it and I respect that point of view, but we will be guided by science and we will be guided by the future development of the farm industries in WA.

"Certainly we don't want WA farmers to be at a competitive disadvantage to other farmers around the world."

Mr Barnett said the WA Nationals and Liberals had similar policy views on the adoption of GM technology.

"I don't sense any difference and I'm not aware of any difference," he said.



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YORK grower Charlie Boyle (right), told WA Premier Colin Barnett that Genetically Modified (GM) canola offered lower chemical use and better control of weeds on his farm.

Mr Boyle is expecting to start swathing his GM canola in three to four weeks time, when the flowers disappear and the pods start to change colour from green to brown.

Thanks to an average start to the season, his GM canola went in dry when there were no weeds to deal with, just rich brown dirt.

The germination was stag-

gered but the yield could go close to two tonnes, while saving him time and money already on chemical application.

The crop has only been sprayed once for the entire year, with glyphosate, which he said killed all the weeds.

In contrast, Mr Boyle said he applied atrazine to the canola crop next to his Roundup Ready canola twice; at the start of the season and at about the eight leaf stage.

"We are not going to go and sow the whole farm out to GM canola, but it will be a very, very useful tool that will broad-

en the rotations," he said to Mr Barnett.

"When canola comes around in the rotation, you have the option of GM Roundup Ready canola or TT canola.

"When I was spraying the crop on the other side of the road with atrazine a bit of it drifted across this (GM canola) crop and killed it dead.

"This crop may be resistant to glyphosate, but it is highly susceptible to pretty much every other chemical used on farm.

"The people who say we are going to end up with a crop that we can't kill; that's silly."



WA Premier Colin Barnett inspecting a GM canola crop at York during his trip to the Wheatbelt last week