

FOOD LABELLING – 13 Nov 08

The Hon. R.B. SUCH (Fisher) (11:55): I move:

That this house requests that the state and federal governments implement more comprehensive food labelling laws.

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (12:16): I rise to speak to the initial motion moved by the member for Fisher. I support the fact that we do need better food labelling laws, because, when they go shopping, people are confused when they see 'Produce of Australia' or 'Made in Australia'. What does it all mean? I doubt whether many members in this place would know all the criteria involved in how companies, manufacturers and importers get around the various nuances of labelling to sell their products.

Personally, I have a bit of an aversion, not just with respect to cost, or anything, but to some of the Black and Gold foods, because I think you do pay for a lot of water in some products. I want to add to my brief comments and talk about genetically modified food. I think there should be better food labelling, because people would be absolutely surprised at how much genetically modified food they are consuming currently. They would be absolutely stunned. We get a lot of furore in the public about genetically modified substances, but, whether you are for it or against it, we do need to be educated about what is already out there so that we know exactly what is going on.

I have an understanding of most breeding, especially grains, and it is certainly current at the moment with the harvest of the first genetically modified crops in Victoria and New South Wales happening as we speak. It makes us focus on what goes on with genetic modification. The fact is that, before some of this technology, we did have genetic modification of plants but it happened over time frames of 10 to 20 years. Essentially, what has happened in the new processes is fast-tracking in the principal form. Food labelling would clear up some of the misconceptions no matter what people's views are on genetically modified substances, as well as providing a more informed debate.

I refer members to genetically modified BT cotton. People are growing this cotton in northern New South Wales and Queensland and they do not need to spray insecticides, or they may need to use one insecticide instead of eight. You would think that wanting to be more green and wanting a better environment that we are better off not using those insecticides. However, back to the debate of better labelling. Whether we are looking at imported food or whether we are trying to learn whether food is a blend of imported food (and we see that quite a bit with fruit juices, such as Brazilian juice blended with Riverland juice, depending on supply and demand), better food labelling would certainly be a good thing. I would like to know whether genetic modification is used on any food. I think people would be surprised at how much is already on the market shelves. I commend the motion.