




Speech By
Bruce Saunders

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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GENE TECHNOLOGY (QUEENSLAND) BILL

 **Mr SAUNDERS** (Maryborough—ALP) (3.41 pm): I rise today to support the Gene Technology (Queensland) Bill. I would like to thank everyone on the committee including the chair, the deputy chair and members of the opposition. I reflect on the words of the member for Buderim as we started this debate when he said that gene technology really excites him. I did make a comment that day during the committee hearing that it is too late to help him with genes now. It is a very interesting subject. Gene technology has a wide range of applications including agriculture, incorporating resistance to pests and disease, and we just heard the learned member for Lockyer talking about cotton. I suppose we have just learnt something from the learned member for Lockyer.

This is a good bill. I am glad that we have an opt-out provision, as that is looking after Queensland's interests. It is important that we have that because, although we mirror the federal legislation, as we all know, sometimes the federal government can get it wrong. It is important that we have that provision. I was very grateful that the minister and the department agreed that we keep that clause and look after Queensland's interests.

When we talk about gene technology, it is confusing to a lot of people because they do not understand it. As a committee we delved into it to find out what is happening. For example, QUT's Distinguished Professor James Dale's banana research sets out to increase the nutritional value of East African cooking bananas. His research project will have profound implications for improving the health and wellbeing of millions of Ugandans and other East Africans where the banana is a staple food. You are looking at improving people's lifestyle and their diet.

Mr Rickuss: It is good science.

Mr SAUNDERS: I take that interjection from the member for Lockyer: it is good science. This will help countries that really need this sort of help, and it is great to see that happening.

Gene technology R & D in Australia occurs under a regulatory framework consisting of Commonwealth and state laws. The Palaszczuk government is committed to providing certainty and consistency for Queensland state government agencies, higher education institutions and sole traders in relation to the regulation of gene technology activities. The Commonwealth Gene Technology Regulator administers and enforces the national regulatory scheme. I am quite sure everyone knows that from the previous speakers.

The scheme aims to protect the health and safety of people and the environment by identifying and managing risks associated with gene technology. We have to make sure when we are trialling genetically modified plants that we have the necessary safeguards in place to ensure we do not have a situation where GM plants escape into the natural environment until they are assessed and are not posing an environmental risk. That was a big worry of mine and the committee.

We must also ensure that genetically modified organisms created in the development of new therapeutic products which are really important in the fight against disease are developed and handled safely and securely to minimise risks to human beings. That is another factor that I was worried about—when you read the data, see movies of the future and when people talk about gene technology and what can happen and what has happened in the past. That was a bit of a worry, but that was covered quite well in the committee.

I turn to the issues with the previous Queensland legislation. The Gene Technology Act 2001 and the Gene Technology Regulation 2002 covered Queensland government agencies, higher education institutions and sole traders. The issue was that, although this legislation mirrored the Commonwealth legislation, every time the Commonwealth legislation was amended the legislation in Queensland had to change too. This is an important point. Gene technology is advancing very rapidly and we know how the world is changing. Legislation needs to keep up with what is happening in the world with this technology. I learnt a lot of interesting facts during the committee hearings.

Mrs Gilbert interjected.

Mr SAUNDERS: I take that interjection from the member for Mackay. It is very interesting what the future holds, how gene technology will eventually help us grow crops in the future and to see where we are heading with gene technology. Queensland is a leader in gene technology, and I believe this bill will keep us at the forefront of gene technology in Australia.

I would like to thank the minister for her input, the departmental representatives and the people who spoke to us at the committee hearings and the other members of the committee whom we shared ideas with. As I said yesterday in my speech on the Grammar Schools Bill, we do have a great committee. There is a lot of talk between committee members. We do thrash things out. Sometimes we disagree, but a lot of times we agree and come to a conclusion. This time the committee came to the conclusion that this bill should be passed. I commend the bill to the House.