




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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GENE TECHNOLOGY (QUEENSLAND) BILL

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (4.14 pm): I have just listened with great interest to my colleague, the member for Gympie, who has outlined a number of the potential benefits of gene technology in the food and agricultural sector to deal with the impact of weeds. Parthenium weed, giant rat's-tail grass, rubber vine and prickly acacia are just some of the weeds which create very negative environmental and economic impacts in our agricultural sector. The cost of managing invasive weeds is felt through lost production as people look for chemical and physical means of trying to address this problem. This is why new technologies like gene technology are so important.

I support the Gene Technology (Queensland) Bill 2016. We already have a legislative framework, but this is about trying to ensure there is a more efficient mechanism of keeping consistency across the nation. In this case the nationally consistent approach has mechanisms that allow it to be kept up to date in a more timely way whilst still maintaining protections and the recognition of Queensland's interests. The use of gene technology, which is regulated through a national scheme, has the ability to enhance economic activity and increase our trade opportunities, particularly through food and agricultural products.

The mechanism in this legislation has been called a lock-step approach, but essentially it is a process that goes beyond our existing mechanisms to allow the legislation to be updated in a more seamless way so that we do not have to come back to this House all the time to move new amendments. This will maintain the opportunity for Queensland to opt out if we believe it is not in our state's interests. The lock-step approach which is proposed in this bill would avoid any inconsistency between the state and national regulation, and that is important because gene technology is regulated through the Commonwealth's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator.

This bill is proceeding because a review was done. While in government the LNP participated in that review and in 2014 it recommended this legislation, so we see before us the outcome of the review and the in-principle agreement. Queensland has the ability to opt out of Commonwealth amendments by regulation if the amendments are not in Queensland's interests. It is important to note that gene technology does not include sexual reproduction, homologous recombination or any other technique specified as not gene technology in the Commonwealth Gene Technology Regulations 2001. The Commonwealth Gene Technology Act 2000 states that GMOs do not include human beings or organisms declared by regulation not to be GMOs.

Practical examples of gene technology in Australia include research undertaken by CSIRO to improve crop and animal productivity and sustainability. This has been mentioned by other speakers but, to reiterate, there may be ways to expedite the conventional breeding of black tiger prawns and to help cotton resist helicoverpa larvae. Scientific advances through gene technology can benefit the community, business, industry and the environment. However, there is broad recognition that the risks and benefits have to be carefully examined and appropriately managed. This is no carte blanche for science to do whatever it feels capable of. There still needs to be appropriate oversights to ensure that

it serves the public and environmental interests and that those oversights and protections are maintained. At the same time we also want to see technology serve our communities, our economy and our environment. I support the committee's recommendation that the bill be passed.