




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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GENE TECHNOLOGY (QUEENSLAND) BILL

 **Mrs SMITH** (Mount Ommaney—LNP) (3.15 pm): I rise to speak to the Gene Technology (Queensland) Bill 2016. From the outset I should state that the LNP opposition will not be opposing this bill because we support the need for and use of gene technology and biotechnology in Queensland, particularly through the agriculture sector. We are also very happy as this bill finalises the review that was undertaken by the member for Mansfield when he was the science minister in 2013-14. Some members may have wondered what this bill was all about when they saw it on the Notice Paper this morning. This industry does not receive regular media coverage, but the need to support a national scheme that regulates and promotes the use of biotechnology in Queensland is essential to developing new markets and trade opportunities and creating new jobs in Queensland.

There are 27 organisations currently accredited by the national regulator, many of them universities and medical research institutes. A quick perusal of some of the current applications being evaluated by the national regulator makes for interesting reading. Those applications include the limited and controlled release of potato genetically modified for disease resistance; the limited and controlled release of Indian mustard genetically modified for altered oil content; the limited and controlled release of cotton genetically modified for insect resistance and herbicide tolerance; and—in good news for banana growers—the limited and controlled release of banana genetically modified for disease resistance. As members can see, commercial opportunities are created through the use of biotechnology, which can help our markets overcome issues of climate, weather, pest and disease, which in turn increases our productivity capacity, particularly in the agriculture sector.

It is important to note that in 2001 an agreement was established for a national regulation scheme for gene technology in Australia, that is, the use of molecular techniques that alter the genetic composition of a living organism, that is, plant, animal, bacteria or virus. In 2013, the former LNP government's department of science, innovation technology, innovation and the arts commissioned an independent review of the Queensland act. The purpose of that review was to investigate whether the Queensland act was operating as an efficient and effective component of the nationally consistent Gene Technology Regulatory Scheme and to investigate particular aspects that were specified in the terms of reference.

While that review found that the Queensland act was achieving its objectives, it concluded that potential efficiencies could be achieved by adopting a lock-step approach to the Commonwealth legislation. However, the review recommended that this should only proceed if there are legislated provisions accompanying the change to the lock step that provide adequate safeguards for Queensland, that is, the opt-out approach, as the minister mentioned. The LNP government's response to the review was publicly released in 2014 and outlined in an in-principle agreement to the review's recommendation No. 3 that Queensland invest in and adopt a lock-step approach that provides adequate safeguards for Queensland's autonomy. That is reflected in the bill.

The explanatory notes describe the objectives of the bill as: to meet the Queensland government's commitment to a nationally consistent scheme for gene technology regulation under the intergovernmental Gene Technology Agreement 2001; and provide certainty and consistency for Queensland state government agencies, higher education institutions and sole traders in regard to the gene technology regulatory scheme and clarity around compliance.

For the benefit of members of the House, I note that five submissions were received. They were from the Department of Health, AusBiotech, the Commonwealth Gene Technology Regulator, Friends of the Earth Australia and Gene Ethics. We note the consultation in the preparation of the bill with state and Commonwealth agencies and the fact that there was a draft bill released for public consultation in April this year.

The lock-step approach proposed in the bill will remove the need to prepare new Queensland legislation every time Commonwealth gene technology legislation is amended. There were submitters who did not support the lock-step approach based on the fact that they saw that it encroached on the role of the Queensland government and the Queensland parliament when changes are made at a national level. The counterargument is that it provides national consistency. AusBiotech also supported the lock-step approach because it will give Queensland companies greater certainty in developing and implementing new gene technologies.

The bill adopts a lock-step opt-out approach by providing Queensland with the ability to opt out of the Commonwealth amendments by regulation if the amendments are not in Queensland's interest. The minister mentioned that it would be on rare occasions that that provision would need to be used. That raises my curiosity. Could the minister in her summing-up give an example of where the state would consider using that opt-out approach? I think it would be good when putting this in context to have an example of when it would not be in our benefit and we would use that safeguard provision.

I thank the minister for the opportunity to have a briefing on the bill. I did not take that up, but nonetheless I appreciated the opportunity. It is important to thank the committee members for their consideration of this bill and for the thoroughness of their report to the House.

As I said from the outset, the LNP will not be opposing this bill because it is essentially as a result of the LNP initiated review in 2013 which we responded to in 2014, led by the then science minister, the member for Mansfield. I think it is a piece of legislation that is essential in reforming our regulatory responsibilities as a state but also in recognition of the national scheme.