




Speech By
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GENE TECHNOLOGY (QUEENSLAND) BILL

 **Miss BARTON** (Broadwater—LNP) (3.35 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Gene Technology (Queensland) Bill 2016. At the outset, I acknowledge my colleagues on the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee and thank the secretariat for the work that they have done in assisting the committee in its inquiry. I would also like to acknowledge officials from the department who took the opportunity to brief our committee on this bill and, of course, those five who took the opportunity to make written submissions.

I would also like to take the opportunity to put on the record my appreciation for the work that the former minister for science, information technology and innovation, the member for Mansfield, did when he was the minister. I acknowledge that the current minister has acknowledged the contribution that he made. It is lovely to see, in a bipartisan fashion today, that we can continue the work that the former minister did before the proroguing of the last parliament.

Gene technology, as has been outlined by many members already in this debate, is the development and use of genetically modified organisms. Gene technology is, in Australia, regulated through an integrated national legislative scheme that protects the environment as well as the health and safety of people, and of course there is also a national regulator.

The purpose of the legislation that we have before us today will ensure the expedition of changes where legislation has been changed at a Commonwealth level. What that will mean is certainty for Queensland government agencies, for higher education institutions, as well as for sole traders. I do not necessarily mean to be repetitive, but it is important to note that these are the organisations that will see the benefits of this legislative change.

When we were going through the committee process and the departmental briefing, we wanted to understand why it was that Queensland was going down the opt-out path. Ultimately what this means is that Queensland has an opportunity to protect Queensland's interests where we need to. For the most part, as has been acknowledged by both the minister and the shadow minister, given the consultation period that has been gone through, there is unlikely to be a need for Queensland to exercise its opt-out provisions, but I think it is important that we retain that opportunity and retain that option for Queensland. I note that the shadow minister has put some questions to the minister, and I too look forward to hearing those responses when the minister responds to the second reading debate. I think it is also important to note that the other jurisdictions in Australia have a range of frameworks that they use with respect to how they mirror the Commonwealth legislation with the exception of WA, which has a moratorium on genetically modified organisms.

Queensland has for many, many years been doing some fantastic work in the space of gene technology. Particularly, in Queensland we see that not only in the agricultural sector but also in medical research. My learned colleague, the member for Lockyer, Ian Rickuss, when he is not causing a ruckus, was just telling me that—

Mr Perrett: That's not fair.

Miss BARTON: Member for Gympie, I think he himself would acknowledge that he sometimes causes a ruckus. The honourable member for Lockyer was telling me that, in particular, in Queensland in the agricultural space cotton producers have been able to take advantage of the significant work that we have seen in terms of the GMO space. I think he was saying that something like 17 different insecticides—

Mr Rickuss: No—reducing the amount of insecticide sprays.

Miss BARTON: Reducing the amount of insecticide sprays from 17 to two. As well, we see the great work that has been done in Queensland with respect to vaccines in the space of medical research. It is worth acknowledging the fantastic work that is being done at the moment at the Institute for Glycomics at Griffith University on the Gold Coast. It is doing some really fantastic work in the space of vaccine development. I would like to acknowledge the work that it does. I am very proud to be a member of the glycomics circle, which is a group of dynamic women who support innovation and medical research. In particular, we look to support female scientists who are doing some really fantastic work.

The chair of the committee, the member for Townsville, and the shadow minister, the member for Mount Ommaney, touched on the five submissions that were received by the committee. As has been acknowledged, the majority of submissions were supportive of the bill with the exception of Friends of the Earth and Gene Ethics. Gene Ethics' motto is that they are working for a GM-free future. Given that that is their tag line, I am sure it comes as no surprise to the House that Gene Ethics was perhaps going to have some issues with some elements of the bill.

Friends of the Earth highlighted, in particular, some concerns around parliamentary sovereignty lest Queensland give up its sovereignty with respect to legislative changes. Given that Queensland retains the opportunity to opt out of certain provisions, and I understand that any legislative change at a Commonwealth level will be made available to the parliament through the tabling of regulations and other provisions, I am sure that any concerns about the sovereignty of the parliament have been ameliorated by the way in which the parliament will have an opportunity to look at these provisions. As I said, there is not a great amount that seems to be of any difficulty to any of the submitters, and I join with the shadow minister in not opposing the bill.