

News Media Release 15/2/18

GM-free SA backed in election debate

Four party candidates debated the merits of South Australia's GM-free farm and food policies for the state election on Monday evening. An audience of sixty grilled them on all aspects of Genetic Manipulation techniques and their products, on farms, in food and research.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, Leon Bignell opened the discussion. He backs new markets for the state's premium food, wine and other primary industries, highlighting the substantial and growing benefits of GM-free labelled export food and beverages.

Parliamentary Leader of The Greens SA Mark Parnell was applauded for the six-year extension of SA's GM moratorium till 2025, which he proposed and steered through parliament with government support.

The Minister said the extension encourages long-term food industry investment to promote GM-free foods. Consistent and substantial premiums for GM-free canola in all states where GM and GM-free are grown also reflects strong export demand for GM-free.

Mark Parnell explained that SA law would allow the government to require GM food labelling, citing the 40 years of container deposit laws as an example of the taking a lead and successfully going it alone. There was sustained audience applause for GM food labelling which enjoys over 90% support in the whole Australian community.

Graham Davies, candidate for SA Best, stressed that the precautionary principle must apply to regulation and release of all Genetically Manipulated organisms, as the new GM techniques (CRISPR etc.) can be used to engineer any life form.

Shadow Minister for Agriculture David Ridgway provisionally accepted the GM moratorium. However, he insisted that a Liberal Government would set up an inquiry to gather more evidence that a GM-free moratorium offers benefits.

The Liberal inquiry would also ask if SA farmers are unfairly deprived of the choice to grow Roundup tolerant GM canola. But Minister Bignell noted that only 221 of the state's 5,300 growers signed a Grain Producers' petition asking him to lift the GM crop ban.

The audience gave unanimous support in a vote on the final resolution, that:

“Those present at this GM-free election forum resolve to support and promote South Australia's GM-free food, farms and research as a positive contribution to the health, wealth and happiness of all citizens and our community.”

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