



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

FOOD STANDARDS AMENDMENT (TRUTH IN LABELLING—GENETICALLY MODIFIED MATERIAL) BILL 2010

Second Reading

SPEECH

Tuesday, 16 November 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 16 November 2010
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Questioner
Speaker Xenophon, Sen Nick

Source Senate
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Senator XENOPHON (South Australia) (4.05 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I table an explanatory memorandum relating to the bill and seek leave to have the second reading speeches incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Senator XENOPHON—*The incorporated speech read as follows—*

The issue of genetically modified food is one that justifiably creates concern in the community.

That said I believe not enough Australians realise that our entire food industry is going through a revolution the likes of which is unprecedented.

And, sadly, not enough Australians seem to realise the implications that the rapid introduction of genetically modified materials may have on our health and potentially on our ability to produce safe foods and foods free from GM contamination.

Right now, Australians are living under one of the weakest food labelling regimes in the world, including when we come to genetically modified foods.

On the surface, our laws seem set up to protect consumers and there is a requirement for all food that contains GM materials to be labelled.

But there are significant exemptions to this requirement that render it useless as a consumer protection.

In September 2010, independent testing by Greenpeace revealed that infant baby formula, S-26 Soy, contained traces of genetically modified (GM) material and that presence of GM had been found in separate trials of the product in varying countries in previous years.

However, because the amount of GM found in the product was less than 1 percent, under the current food labelling standards, manufacturers, producers and distributors are not required to label their products as containing GM.

In fact, if the presence is less than 1 percent and the manufacturer, producer or distributor claims it was ‘unintentional’, they are not in breach of any labelling requirement.

This is despite growing community consensus that consumers have a right to know what they are eating, and many want to know if they are consuming products which have a presence of genetically modified materials.

A 2009 Newspoll survey found that 90 percent of Australian consumers want all food derived from GM crops to be labelled.

Australians want to know what’s in their food and what they’re feeding their families.

This Bill will require the accurate labelling of genetically modified material in food.

Under the Bill, Food Standards Australia New Zealand will be required to introduce a standard for the labelling of genetically modified material, irrespective of the amount or how it came to be present.

It also requires Food Standards Australia New Zealand to establish due diligence guidelines for products which claim to be GM-Free.

This will ensure that products that claim to be GM-Free, whether it’s by way of using it in their labelling or by not having any labelling, will be required to provide evidence of their claim.

I thank Greenpeace for their ongoing campaigning on this issue.

Truth in labelling is vital to enable Australian consumers to have an informed choice about the food they eat and the products they consume.

Otherwise, we are literally shopping in the dark.

Quite simply, Australians have a right to know, and this Bill will ensure that manufacturers, producers and distributors provide them with clear labelling information about genetically modified materials.