



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

PETITIONS

**Petition: Food Colouring Additives,
Petition: Use of Pesticides**

SPEECH

Thursday, 27 February 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Thursday, 27 February 2014 Page 104 Questioner Speaker Parke, Melissa, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (11:35): I rise to make some remarks in relation to two petitions that I have been asked to lodge on behalf of concerned Western Australians and I hereby table those petitions.

The first petition was brought to my attention by a young man in my electorate, Leeuwin Prince-Ruiz, who is concerned about the impact of certain food colouring additives, and it calls for regulatory changes that would mean the use of such additives could only occur with appropriate warning labels. The second petition, by Alexandra Jones, a resident of Nedlands, concerns the use of pesticides. Both petitions go to the general issue of our potential exposure to chemicals; to the proper regulation of such chemicals, especially where they have the potential to affect our health; and to the appropriate disclosure of their presence.

I am sure all members of this place are pleased when they meet or hear from young people who are engaged in matters of public policy. So, naturally, it was fantastic to be approached by Leeuwin, with his strong interest in the issue of food additives and their health risks, especially for young people. Leeuwin's petition is clear and to the point. It notes that six food colourings which are commonly used in a range of food products available in Australia, and which are most commonly present in foods designed for consumption by children, have been found to be associated with hyperactivity and behavioural problems. It notes that the food standards regulator in the European Union has required that foods containing these colouring additives carry a warning which informs people that such ingredients may cause hyperactivity, and it calls on Australia's food regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand, to introduce the same requirement.

I am aware that FSANZ has considered the issue of food colouring additives and has taken account of the Southampton study referred to in the petition, while noting the European Food Safety Authority's more recent view that the available evidence is unclear. Nevertheless, European food labels do carry the warning and I support Leeuwin's position, based on the precautionary principle that this is an area that merits ongoing scrutiny and consideration of a precautionary label in future.

I have spoken a number of times on the importance of accurate and informative food labelling. It is always strange to hear arguments against market transparency in the form of labelling requirements. These include the claim that proper labelling constitutes the unnecessary intervention of the 'nanny state'. But markets operate best when people are properly informed in making their choices from a range of competitive options. This is precisely the way in which markets are supposed to deliver the best outcome, in addition to doing so with the most efficient use of resources. If you take the position that manufacturers ought to be able to put products into the market without providing transparent information about that product, especially its health risks and in addition you take the position that manufacturers ought to be able to issue unregulated and inaccurate claims about the benefits of their product, and that consumers should simply take their chances in the face of both that secrecy and that misrepresentation, that is not a 'pro-market' position; that is simply the law of the jungle. The position you support is 'anything goes', and that is unconscionable. Once again I congratulate Leeuwin Prince-Ruiz for his insightful petition.

The second petition relates to the use of pesticides and herbicides, and specifically to the practice of chemical weeding undertaken by local and state government authorities. The petition has been formed and circulated by the Pesticide Action Group WA, and I am grateful to Alex Jones for bringing it to my attention on the group's behalf. The group has grown particularly concerned with the decision of the Nedlands local council to change from a steam-weeding regime to the more risky use of pesticides. Chemical treatment of weeds involves the use of pesticides, such as glyphosate, which pose known health risks and which can persist in the local environment. Glyphosate is known to break down into chemicals that can be more mobile and toxic than glyphosate itself.

Because of their propensity to adhere to soil, dust and hard surfaces these pesticides present a risk of leaching into local drains, streams and rivers through run-off. That means chemicals can find their way into water systems, including the Swan and Canning Rivers in metropolitan Perth.

The attraction to chemical means of weed control is chiefly in relation to cost savings and, apparently, the return to the use of pesticides by the Nedlands Council has produced an annual saving of some \$83,000. The petitioners argue that such savings do not take into account the public health and environmental costs of pesticides and that is a very legitimate argument.

The Pesticide Action Group WA has voiced its opposition to chemical weeding through the local government channels available to them without success and, therefore, clearly feels that wider investigation and action on this issue is necessary.

The petition calls for a royal commission to consider the use of pesticides by local and state governments, and the related risks and harm to public health and the environment.

When it comes to the issue of pesticides, I agree that further research and analysis should occur, especially in relation to their use in highly populated areas, and where food production and water ecosystems are involved.