



Speech by

JEFF KNUTH

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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PRIMARY INDUSTRIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—ONP) (4.51 p.m.): I commend the Minister for the time and effort that he has no doubt committed to researching the issues addressed in the amendment Bill before the House. The industry alone must not be blamed for residue incidents in the past as Governments have allowed those chemicals to be obtained and used with little or no training or regulation. The chemicals responsible for the situations in which Australia's beef industry was placed in jeopardy on world markets have, in the main, been replaced by environmentally friendly products and are now illegal. The National Vendor Declaration program, together with beef residue testing programs at all export facilities, has proven effective since its introduction.

I am not entirely opposed to a penalty system being introduced to complement the declaration process, but I am greatly concerned that a producer may be treated like a criminal and fined up to \$7,500 at the whim of a magistrate or judge. A recent case in Townsville in which a highly regarded cattle producer was fined heavily for selling one animal in a group that he stated had not been treated with growth hormones highlights my point. If a producer buys stock in good faith and is then fined because of somebody else's dishonesty, that is a great injustice and one against which he has no protection. 100 penalty units is too severe a penalty. If that penalty were reduced by half, it would still have the desired effect without impacting too heavily on an already embattled industry.

The issues that the Minister has raised regarding the current branding methods, brand positioning and livestock identification are basically straightforward. I have a serious concern that once rib branding is phased out, rump branding will also be targeted. I agree totally with the rejection of cheek branding as I have always considered the practice to be inhumane and unnecessary. I support the Minister's six initiatives and believe that the industry will respond favourably to those changes, especially if processors are encouraged to pay a premium for high-quality hides. I remind the House that the six initiatives are: eliminate the rib and cheek branding positions; include the twist as a new branding position; include the thigh as a separate branding position; allow branding on any angle; eliminate the mandatory order of branding; and allow flexible placement of age numerals and stud references in any of the prescribed branding positions.

So far as I can ascertain, currently the cattle producer receives no more for his product whether the hide is in poor or excellent condition, so there is little incentive to brand in positions where livestock identification is made more difficult. The idea of branding vertically down the leg may seem reasonable from a processor's viewpoint, but the Minister should consider the position of a producer who has 1,000 head in the yards and is attempting to identify cattle for market or record-keeping purposes. To confuse the issue further, straying cattle from neighbouring properties will be virtually impossible to identify in large yardings or in paddock situations. On my family's cattle properties, there is a gentlemen's agreement that, if the cattle cross into another property, they are rounded up and—most of the time—they are given back. The vertical branding procedure would make that very difficult. A lot of the Burdekin River frontages are not fenced off. It is impossible to fence off some of those properties, because in the wet season we can have 100 inches of rain. That must be taken into consideration.

Changing branding habits may be convenient for the processors but may inconvenience the grazier. If the amendment is passed, I would like to see at least a form of compensation provided at the saleyards for the huge disruption to the pastoral practices.