



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Hansard 19 November 1998

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (4.39 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Bill before the House, the Primary Industries Legislation Amendment Bill. As has been outlined by the Minister for Primary Industries, this Bill makes a number of useful legislative changes to several Bills in this important portfolio.

Before going any further, I thought it might be interesting to reflect just for a moment on the Minister's record in Primary Industries. Over the past four months, the Minister has shown a tremendous interest in and empathy with rural producers in this State. He has been praised across-the-board for his consultative approach and his open mind on issues. He is prepared to listen, he is prepared to go out into the country, and he is prepared to talk. I believe that one of the main reasons for this praise comes from the Minister's willingness to make decisions when the interests of rural Queenslanders are at stake. That willingness is becoming well known across Queensland. I am, of course, alluding to the infamous back paddock. In the back paddock, the National Party kept all the issues that were too hard for it to handle. It left important reviews, such as the dairy review, out in the back paddock, incomplete.

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr Pearce: Members of the National Party left them in the back paddock, down behind the trees, and did nothing about them. They left other important issues, like the fate of the Brisbane Markets, unresolved. Where did they leave that? Down in the back paddock—unresolved! The member knows that, and that is why he is so sensitive. They left important industries, like meat processing, out on a limb. And they left important legislative amendments, like those to the Brands Act, languish. All were left in the big back paddock—down the back behind the trees. Out of sight, out of mind!

A Government member: Getting bigger every day.

Mr PEARCE: It gets bigger every day.

The Minister for Primary Industries is de-stocking the Nationals' back paddock. Gradually, the Minister is bringing forward all those things that members opposite left in the back paddock. He is taking them out into Queensland. He is dealing with them. He is getting on with the job. That is why the people of rural Queensland have a lot of respect for him. Members know that I have a big rural electorate, and the Minister has a lot of respect out there. I saw him sit down the other day in front of a local authority, and he took all the notes himself. He did not get somebody else to do that, and they were very impressed by that. I believe that the Minister is having a big impact, and I am very pleased to be a member of his committee.

Mr Seeney: This isn't a motion of confidence. What about the Bill?

Mr PEARCE: I am about to talk to the Bill. The honourable member for Callide should follow the same principles when he is on his feet. I was going to speak to three of the amendments that are contained within this Bill, namely, the amendments to the City of Brisbane Market Act 1960 and the Forestry Act 1959. However, because of time constraints, I will make a few comments about the amendments to the Agricultural Standards Act 1949.

There have been a number of serious threats to access to overseas markets over the past 25 years as a result of various incidents of avoidable chemical residue contamination in beef. This is an

important issue to me, because not only do I have the beef industry in my electorate, I have the cotton industry and other grain-growing industries that use pesticides from time to time. This is a big concern to everybody involved in agriculture and primary industries in my electorate.

Nationally, the cattle industry has acknowledged the need to deal with this problem in order to maintain our access to vital markets in Europe, Asia and the United States. The ability of our cattle industry to avoid this problem has been hampered, in part, because of the absence of vendor declaration and vendor liability arrangements when cattle are traded. The industry's response to these concerns has been a voluntary declaration system: the National Vendor Declaration (Cattle). In this system, sellers make and supply declarations about the chemical treatments and history of their sale cattle. Therefore, a producer may indicate whether or not a beast has been treated with hormonal growth promotants, or HGP. Members would be aware that the European Union takes a very hard line on cattle treated with HGP. This system is now widely used in the cattle industry.

This Bill contains amendments to give this system some teeth and to promote confidence in, and give rigour to what is a voluntary system. What the Bill does, in essence, is create a new offence for sellers or vendors of stock making false declarations. I believe that the industry is pretty clean at the moment. Unfortunately, there will always be people who are prepared to take a risk. We cannot afford to create an environment that allows people to do that, because it puts at risk the cattle industry in this State. It is so important to us that we cannot allow people to take that risk. But people will take a risk if they think that they can get away with it. And if they do get caught, the penalty is not severe enough.

These representations must relate to specific wholesomeness and product integrity issues. Regulations made under the Act will provide details of the stock species and the specific issues to which the penalty provisions will apply. The Bill also increases penalties under the Agricultural Standards Act to a level currently commensurate with the seriousness of the offences involved. That is what I was trying to explain a couple of minutes ago.

These amendments are practical solutions to a problem which has been identified as potentially costing Australia export income. The changes are supported by the cattle industry, and I urge members to also support them. As I said, there were other issues that I wanted to speak about, but time does not permit. I support the Bill before the House.
