



Speech by

**Dr LESLEY CLARK**

**MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER**

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### **FOOD PRODUCTION [SAFETY] BILL**

**Dr CLARK** (Barron River—ALP) (5.22 p.m.): The Australian New Zealand Food Authority—ANZFA—has estimated that every day 11,500 people contract a food-borne disease, costing the Australian community over \$2.6 billion every year. However, that figure needs to be put in perspective, because of the 20 billion meals that are served every year, only 0.02% of them result in food-borne illnesses, indicating that, in fact, the vast majority of food businesses operate at a very high standard. Nevertheless, the Australian community, consumers, industry and Government will benefit from a further reduction in the current level of food-borne illnesses through less pain and suffering, lower health care costs, less absenteeism, improved business productivity, increased competitiveness on world markets and a reduction in business failure and associated costs, including civil litigation.

The tourist industry in Cairns knows only too well the damage that can be done to a reputation when safety procedures break down and food poisoning occurs. The limitations of the current fragmented food hygiene regulatory system were investigated in 1995 and Commonwealth, State and Territory Health Ministers asked ANZFA to develop national uniform food safety standards for Australia as part of the Food Standards Code that was to become law in each State and Territory. Five years on, significant progress has been made with respect to achieving a comprehensive paddock-to-plate approach to food safety in Australia, and the Food Production (Safety) Bill is part of that progress in Queensland.

In Queensland, we have opted for the approach of complementary legislation to ensure food safety, with this Bill applying solely to primary industries under the responsibility of the Minister for Primary Industries. Similar outcomes-based food safety reform is under way for the manufacturing, retail and services section of the food industry, which will remain the province of Queensland Health, regulated by the Food Act and subject to food safety standards developed by ANZFA, with the exception of retail butcher shops and prepackaged meats to be sold in supermarkets, which will remain regulated by Food Safe. On the other hand, ultimately, the responsibility for the regulation of the manufacture and sale of milk products and smallgoods will become the responsibility of Queensland Health. Officers from Primary Industries and Queensland Health have been and will continue to work together closely to avoid duplication or gaps and ensure a consistent risk-based management approach to food safety in legislation in their respective portfolios that will satisfy the intent of the ANZFA food safety reform agenda for national uniformity.

I commend the Government for adopting this model, because we need to be mindful of the experience in the UK with the so-called mad cow disease, which highlighted the need for health authorities to have a strong role in regulating for food safety. I understand that New South Wales is considering giving their safe food authority responsibility for all food safety matters. However, I personally think that there are some dangers in this approach that need careful consideration.

So in Queensland, Safe Food, the statutory authority established by this Bill, will have the responsibility to manage and implement food safety schemes for each of the major primary industries of meat, dairy and seafood over the next four years. Food safety schemes for eggs, horticulture and grain will be developed in future years. The safety schemes will cover the where and how of the handling of primary produce up to the point of retail or manufacture from where the food safety standards, which will be subordinate legislation under the Food Act, will take over. The safety schemes

may also provide that accredited primary production businesses must develop a food safety program that is tailor-made for each business, setting out the potential food safety risks and how they are to be monitored and controlled.

The new risk-based management approach will also require the introduction of an auditing system to ensure that places and activities associated with the production of primary produce comply with the Act and that an adequate food safety program for the business is in place. The environmental health officers employed by local government may perform these food safety audits, as it is intended that the retail, manufacturing and service sectors of the food industry or primary producers may choose their own accredited auditor.

No doubt the key to the success of this legislation is a strong partnership between Safe Food, industry, technical and food science experts. The legislation does this by establishing a food safety advisory committee, which has representatives from each industry that will or does operate under a food safety scheme; a representative from DPI and Health; and room for the appointment of experts in food technology, human nutrition and public health. It is also important to note that food safety schemes cannot be made unless Safe Food has consulted with the food safety advisory committee.

A similar consultative approach is being adopted in Queensland with the implementation of the three ANZFA food safety standards that were gazetted last month and cover food safety practices, premises and equipment. An information paper regarding these standards has been produced by Queensland Health and has been forwarded to local government and industry for comment.

The production of food safety programs by individual businesses, as required by food safety standard 3.2.1 under the Food Standards Code, has not yet been gazetted. In fact, it has been deferred by the Commonwealth until a cost-benefit analysis has been completed. However, Queensland, along with a number of other States, has resolved not to wait but rather to work with the industry to implement all four food safety standards, including standard 3.2.1. To that end, in my role as parliamentary secretary assisting the Health Minister in the area of food safety reform, I will be chairing a food safety stakeholders forum. I look forward to updating the Parliament with respect to the progress of the stakeholders' forum, which I believe will make a significant contribution to implementing the ANZFA food safety standards in a practical, cost-effective and industry friendly manner.

In conclusion, I congratulate the Minister for Primary Industries on bringing forward this important legislation, which is the first milestone in the introduction of a new era with respect to food safety in Queensland. I commend the Bill to the House.

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