



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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FOOD PRODUCTION [SAFETY] BILL

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (4.47 p.m.): I support the Food Production (Safety) Bill 2000, which establishes Safe Food, a statutory authority. It aims to ensure that primary produce is fit for human and animal consumption. It covers all aspects of food production, from the paddock to the plate. To achieve this objective, Safe Food has a statutory responsibility covering four main areas—

- to manage and implement food safety schemes for industry;
- to accredit businesses that produce primary produce;
- to manage the food safety auditing of primary production businesses; and
- to accredit auditors.

Safe Food will phase in food safety responsibility for the major primary industries over the next four years. In the process, it would allow time for a genuine partnership to be established. This measured approach allows for a smooth and effective transition to the new arrangements.

The Bill provides a Queensland infrastructure to implement a truly national food safety regulation. The Australia New Zealand Food Authority—ANZFA—recently developed draft food safety standards to be implemented over six years. These standards require preventive programs to be in place at all points in the food supply chain where significant food safety risks may arise. They will have a marked and positive influence on our domestic and export markets.

There has been developed a carefully structured regime of accreditation and auditing that is vital to the success of the Safe Food program. The process makes room for some degree of choice on the part of the primary producer. For example, each accredited primary producer may choose their own accredited auditor to audit their primary production business to make sure that it complies with the Act and that an adequate food safety program for the business is in place. The auditor will then report to Safe Food on whether the business has complied.

The Bill provides for a number of serious food safety offences, with maximum penalties ranging from \$65,000 to \$225,000. The major serious food safety offences are the supply or production of unsafe primary produce and the unauthorised production of primary produce. The penalties are high to strongly deter individuals and corporations from producing or supplying unsafe primary produce. This Government is determined that a Garibaldi-type food safety crisis, as occurred in South Australia, will not occur in this State. The previous speaker likened these penalties to penalties contained in the Criminal Code. Surely the failure to maintain high standards of safety equates to a criminal act.

There is an urgent need to reduce duplication in the area of food safety. This Bill accommodates a solution to this concern. Safe Food will initially draw together and manage the food safety programs and accreditation audit programs of animal protein products—meat, dairy and seafood—under the jurisdiction of a single food safety agency. The authority may implement similar programs and audits in relation to other primary industry sectors such as eggs, fruit and vegetables and grains if these are in fact required.

Safe Food will establish close linkages with the primary industry bodies and primary production groups by taking food safety management back to the farm and the fishing vessel and will include activities such as feed supply. It will ensure that the production of primary produce is safe for human

and animal consumption. This is not about creating red tape, as suggested by the previous speaker. It creates a uniform set of standards. In fact, it reduces duplication and, if embraced by those involved, it will not only streamline the process of accreditation but will have a positive effect on the ability to market produce.

Widespread consultation with industry organisations has been conducted and there is a recognition that improved regulatory arrangements are needed. There is also an expectation of cost savings and administrative efficiencies in combining food safety functions. The key to this legislation is that it provides a framework to maximise the opportunity to develop a partnership between the authority, food industries and consumers in the development of food safety schemes. Each food safety scheme must establish a structure for continuing consultation with the relevant industry sectors on the operation of the scheme and any changes to it. To assist in that process, a Food Safety Advisory Committee will be established.

This committee will have representatives from each industry that operates under a food safety scheme, along with a representative from the Departments of Primary Industries and Health. Provisions have also been made for the appointment of people with appropriate expertise in areas such as food technology, human nutrition, environmental or public health, microbiology or epidemiology. The Bill allows the Minister to appoint subcommittees with technical and industry expertise to assist the members of the advisory committee. With this partnership approach, Safe Food will take safety management back to the farm and the fishing vessel and will include scrutiny of activities such as feed supply. In so doing, Safe Food will form an integral part of the Queensland framework for the management of food safety from source to consumer.

In my capacity as a local member, I have received some inquiries about the way in which the authority is to be funded and concern has been expressed that some additional costs will be imposed. It is anticipated that once operational, Safe Food will, within the four-year phasing-in period, be self-funding and will generate sufficient revenue from fees and charges for the services provided to cover costs. There will be both cost savings and administrative efficiencies in combining the food safety functions of the existing regulatory agencies into a single regulatory body. There will be major benefits in terms of funding when the food safety functions of the QLMA and QDA are amalgamated and merged into the new authority.

The legislation proposes a partnership between all levels of Government, industry and consumers to achieve a well integrated, streamlined and cost effective co-regulatory system based on risk to public health and safety across the whole food supply chain. This is achieved through the implementation of co-regulatory preventive food safety regimes called food safety schemes. Because each food safety scheme is a regulation under statute, a regulatory impact statement needs to be prepared. This is a cost benefit analysis of the scheme's provisions and alternative options. An RIS ensures that food safety schemes are soundly based, effectively targeted and do not impose unnecessary costs on business. They guarantee transparency and will maximise the opportunity to develop a partnership between the authority, food industries and consumers in the development of the food safety schemes themselves.

Safe Food will be managed by a chief executive officer who will report directly to the Minister for Primary Industries. Safe Food's accountability is assured through a number of statutory measures. Firstly, within the Bill clause 32 provides that the chief executive officer must prepare a business plan each year and that the plan must cover such things as any food safety schemes being developed, projected cost structures and funding arrangements for each food safety scheme, Safe Food's funding arrangements for the food safety activities carried out by Safe Food, Safe Food's administrative costs and how Safe Food intends to ensure its activities are managed on a cost recovery basis. The chief executive officer must give the Minister a copy of the business plan by 31 March each year.

Secondly, clause 17 of the Bill provides that the Minister may give Safe Food a written direction about the performance of Safe Food's function, exercise of its powers or written notice of a public sector policy, and Safe Food must ensure the direction or policy is complied with. Thirdly, contained in clause 26 the Food Safety Advisory Committee, as constituted by industry representatives and food safety experts, may give advice or recommendations to Safe Food or the Minister about food safety schemes or Safe Food's function. Prior to a food safety scheme being made, consultation must take place with a food safety committee.

In conclusion, the Food Production (Safety) Bill 2000 is an excellent and timely piece of legislation. It will provide consumers with a level of confidence in the quality of food products. There have been sufficient examples in recent years of illness and death as a result of food being consumed which has not met acceptable standards. In addition, primary producers and retailers have a genuine vested interest in maintaining the highest of safety standards. Only by achieving this will consumers have the necessary confidence in the product that will protect and increase existing levels of sales. I congratulate the Minister on his initiative, and I commend the Bill to the House.