



Speech by

CAROLYN MALE

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard 13 December 2001

PEST MANAGEMENT BILL

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (12.39 p.m.): I rise today in support of the Pest Management Bill 2001. This bill was designed to provide greater protection to the public from the health risks associated with chemicals used in the pest management industry. Most operators are performing to a safe standard, but it is necessary to tighten the legislative requirements and regulations to prevent problems that could arise. The legislation will ensure that all persons who are licensed to provide pest control or fumigation services have the appropriate skills and competence to provide those services in a safe and effective manner. Licensees will need to meet nationally endorsed competency based standards for pest control and fumigation activities.

Since the 1970s, pest control operators and fumigators, known as pest management technicians, have been regulated in Queensland by way of a licensing regime under the Health Act 1937. This legislation has become dated and has not kept pace with changes that have occurred within the pest management industry over the years. Nor does it conform with current drafting practice or fundamental legislative principles.

The Pest Management Bill establishes a new regulatory framework for pest management technicians in Queensland. The bill retains a licensing system for persons carrying out pest management activities. Licensing is the most effective means of protecting the public from the health risks involved with pest control and fumigation activities and from the adverse effects of the ineffective control of pests.

In Queensland there are a total of 2,265 licensed pest management technicians. 1,094 of those people have a restricted licence, which means that the pest management technician is restricted to using a certain number of chemicals, ensuring that technicians use only the chemicals for which they have adequate knowledge to ensure public safety. Fumigators who undertake a higher risk activity number 209 in Queensland. They work mainly in environments such as aircraft and docks and fumigate for agricultural, horticultural and quarantine purposes.

Regulation of pest control operators dates back to 1976 when it was incorporated into the Health Act 1937. Queensland was one of the first Australian jurisdictions to regulate pest management technicians. While these technicians were required to be licensed in Queensland from 1976, a licensing system was introduced in some other jurisdictions only after a recommendation from the National Health and Medical Research Council in the mid 1990s. So once again, Queensland is way ahead of all the other states.

While Queensland was among the first jurisdictions to regulate pest management technicians, the existing provisions are now out of date. The new bill reflects current legislative drafting standards and the improved pest management competency standards which are now recognised as essential to protecting public health. The new legislation also takes account of regulatory reform principles and the desirability of minimising red tape and costs to businesses.

High standards of pest management are important to the community and to maintaining public health standards. Many of the pests which pest management technicians deal with can contribute to health problems if not adequately managed in both domestic and commercial environments. Among other pests, these technicians deal with cockroaches, of which I have an entirely irrational fear, mice and rats, which can contaminate food and transmit disease. Mosquitoes are recognised as a significant

problem in Queensland. They can transmit diseases such as Ross River virus, dengue fever and Japanese encephalitis, among others.

Spiders such as red-backs are common in domestic environments and can present a hazard, particularly to the young and vulnerable. My eldest daughter, Jordan, who is a bit of a junior entomologist, was very pleased with herself the other day and wanted me to have a look at this wonderful spider she had trapped in a glass. She wanted me to admire the beautiful red stripe on its back. From that point on we knew that we had to get the pest controllers out, because the last thing we need is for our precious children to be endangered in any way.

Mr English: I hope you are not padding. The member for Robina will be upset.

Ms MALE: I am definitely not padding. Adequate control of these pests by licensed technicians who have the skills and knowledge to safely eradicate the pests is important to the community. As I have just outlined, it is also important to me.

It is essential that pest management and fumigation activities that use pesticides and fumigants in the treatment process are undertaken by competent technicians. Under the new legislation, licensed pest management technicians will have training in the use of these pesticides and fumigants to the level of the national competency standards. The competency standards will ensure that licensed technicians will have adequate knowledge of the pesticides and fumigants, of the impact on people who live in the areas being treated and of adverse environmental impacts. The national competency standards, which must be met by pest management technicians who are licensed under the new legislation, will help to ensure that the technicians undertaking these activities have the appropriate skills and knowledge. They will have the skills and knowledge to appropriately treat the target pests while minimising any risk to the public.

Those pest management technicians who currently hold an unrestricted licence under the Health Act have already met those standards of competency and will not be required to undertake additional training. People who currently hold a restricted licence will have two years to either have their competence assessed or undertake training to reach the required standard of competence.

The bill results from a comprehensive review of the current legislation. It involved extensive consultation with the pest management industry and other key stakeholders, including the Queensland branch of the Australian Environmental Pest Managers Association. The AEPMA is the peak industry body in Australia and has been the leading representative of the industry for 15 to 20 years. The pest management industry, through the AEPMA, has been a key driver in the development of new national competency standards for pest management. The association has worked in close contact with licensing authorities in each state and territory and fully supports licensing and the national competency standards, which it collaborated in developing.

As part of the consultation process, stakeholders were given an opportunity to comment on an exposure draft of the bill. The bill has a high degree of support, particularly from industry stakeholders, who welcome the bill to the extent that it will help rid the industry of unscrupulous or shonky operators. I congratulate the minister and the industry stakeholders on their ability to work together to produce such solid, workable legislation. I commend the bill to the House.
