



Speech by

**Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

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Hansard 16 October 2001

### **PRIMARY INDUSTRIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Hon. H. PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (5.13 p.m.), in reply: At the outset, I thank all honourable members who participated in the debate today. The debate was very constructive, and some issues were raised that need attention. The opposition's spokesperson raised a number of issues, and with justification. His main issue of concern related to the ownership of veterinarian practices, and that was the main concern of the member for Gregory and the member for Toowoomba South. I assure those honourable members that the government is very cognisant of the fact that there is concern in the community in relation to ownership of veterinary surgeries by persons other than veterinarians. This situation also currently applies to medical practices, because companies and non-practitioners own medical practices. Of course, as we all know, the only current exemption from this rule relates to the ownership of pharmacies.

For the benefit of honourable members opposite, the advantages of opening up the ownership of veterinary surgeries is to attract rural practitioners. We believe that there will be money available from the community to establish practices in rural Queensland which will then employ new graduates. The reason graduates cannot establish their own practices from the outset is the high HECS debt they have to pay after they complete their university degree. Therefore, they cannot establish their own practice for many years. Opening up veterinary surgeries to the public will ensure that we can expand our veterinary establishments in country areas. The member for Gregory also focused on this issue. As a member who represents a country electorate, I can understand where he is coming from. However, I assure the honourable member that part of the government's thinking behind this amendment is to try to entice more vets into our country areas.

The member for Hinchinbrook also raised the issue of female veterinarians in country areas. I have some Queensland based vet statistics. Of Queensland based vets, there are currently 1,029 males, which is 64 per cent of the vet population, and 583 females, which constitutes around about 36 per cent. As far as all registered vets with Queensland boards are concerned, there are 1,247 males and 667 females, and that equates to about 35 per cent of females within the veterinary profession. Those opposite may be interested to know that in 1981 only 14.2 per cent of the registered vets in Queensland were females. Unfortunately, whilst this figure is still low, it is certainly higher than the number of women on rural boards and committees. This bill will assist the growth of the profession generally. This bill will also create a lot more opportunities for our female veterinarians.

The next issue I want to touch on relates to veterinarians being accorded the right to use 'Dr' in their title. As this legislation currently stands, the use of titles by veterinarians other than their veterinary qualifications is regarded as professional misconduct. Veterinarians registered in Queensland have been unable to legally use the title 'Dr' while their interstate colleagues—even those who obtained their qualifications in Queensland and who go interstate—can by right use the title 'Dr'. When they come back to Queensland, they have to revert back to 'Mr'. The standing of Queensland veterinarians has been consequently diminished in terms of interstate and international colleagues in terms of this prohibition. Veterinarians complete a five-year degree course. There is no sensible reason why Queensland trained graduates should not be able to receive equal recognition within their profession.

There are also potential overseas trade ramifications if the prohibition remains in place. Veterinarians are required to certify the health status of livestock and livestock products for trade

movements. Certifications from veterinarians in other states, giving the appearance of superior ability by use of the title 'Dr', could see overseas trading partners prefer to deal with other states rather than Queensland because all of their veterinarians can use the title 'Dr' whilst those in Queensland cannot. I will be moving that amendment during the committee stage. I certainly hope that it will receive the support of honourable members opposite.

The opposition spokesperson also spoke about the Queensland Abattoir Corporation and its winding up, as did the members for Gladstone and Gregory. For the benefit of the House I will give the current status of Queensland Abattoir Corporation facilities. We know that there are five. I will go through them one at a time. The member for Logan waxed lyrical about the Cannon Hill abattoir and the great work that is being done by the Lee family, but I will go through them all one at a time.

In Toowoomba, the abattoir is closed and the site is now cleared. The site has been sold to Wagners, a gravel and building materials supplier, which has erected a concrete plant on the site. The Ipswich facility, which is commonly called Churchill, is now owned by Churchill Abattoirs Pty Ltd. It is owned by Millmerran pig, poultry and livestock producers Doug Hall and Sons. The site was given an EPA clearance prior to sale.

In Brisbane, the Cannon Hill abattoir, which is very dear to the heart of a certain member of this House, the member for Bulimba, is now owned by Australian Country Choice, which is the Coles supermarket supplier. Frigmobile Ltd has also built a cool storage facility on the site. There is still some remediation work and demolition of unused buildings required to be done by the administrator as part of the sale contract with ACC before an EPA clearance can be obtained.

The abattoir at Bundaberg is closed, the site is cleared and the land has been transferred from the Abattoir Corporation to the coordinator-general under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act for the development of a food park. This is being handled by the Department of State Development.

The Townsville facility is currently the topic of conversation amongst many members opposite and on this side of the House. There used to be two separate operations at Bohle, on a Crown reserve which is leased by the Department of Natural Resources under a trust arrangement to the QAC. One operation was the saleyards, which have been closed, and the site has been remediated to EPA requirements. The future use of this part of the Bohle reserve is now a DNR&M responsibility. The other operation is an abattoir and rendering works, which has been subleased by the Queensland Abattoir Corporation to private sector operators. The subleases on these facilities and surrounding land run to October 2005.

The member for Gladstone did raise an issue in relation to governments exiting public ownership of facilities such as abattoir corporations. At the end of the day, sometimes governments have to make decisions. We as the Labor Party are pretty well committed to public facilities, but why should governments really be involved in the operation of abattoirs when out there in the community there are far better persons qualified to do that? We can certainly use the money we save there in other, more important areas, especially in my portfolio.

The issue of DPI jobs was raised by the member for Toowoomba South. I believe that he was misleading when he referred to DPI staff numbers. He referred to a number of jobs that he claimed had been cut from DPI. However, he fails to take into account that 300 or so jobs created to eradicate the papaya fruit fly were subsequently not required due to the success of the campaign. Also, the Leader of the Opposition does not take into consideration that 280 corporate services jobs were transferred from the Department of Primary Industries to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. The situation with the papaya fruit fly program—a successful program for which the 300 staff were no longer required—is the same as the situation with the fire ant program. We have put on close to 500 people for that program. At the end of a successful campaign to eradicate fire ants from Queensland, hopefully within the next five years, those staff will become redundant also.

The member for Gregory raised the issue of the meat inspector being removed from Longreach. The meat inspector he referred to was not from the MLAC. He was an employee of Safe Food Production Queensland. The Safe Food Production officer located in Longreach was positioned there on a temporary basis to assist the industry. This arrangement has been extended until Christmas. I am advised that Safe Food Production considers that it is more effective to service the region from Rockhampton.

I will go through some of the comments of other members. The member for Toowoomba North certainly raised some very important issues. I have taken on board many of his statements. He certainly has taken a very keen interest in primary industries and primary industries matters, especially issues that relate to his electorate and areas surrounding his electorate. I am always pleased and happy to have the member for Toowoomba North represent me at important functions.

As I said earlier, the honourable member for Logan waxed lyrical on a number of issues. Some did not relate to the amendments in the bill. When one considers the issues raised by the honourable

member for Logan, one sees that he certainly has a passion for exporting Queensland products overseas. He has a passion for seeing not only that our boxed beef is exported overseas but also that our live cattle is exported to markets that cannot be serviced by our boxed beef market, which in turn will be converted to boxed beef markets. He referred particularly to Vietnam. Certainly there is a huge potential to increase our exports of live cattle to that country. Of the shipments that have gone there, the meat being presented in the supermarkets certainly attracted very high prices. That augurs well for our live cattle to be further exported to Vietnam.

The honourable member for Broadwater spoke at length and in very good detail on the amendments to the veterinary surgeries provisions and ownership of practices. She is working pretty closely with the Animal Welfare League in her own electorate. The Animal Welfare League was one group that actually lobbied me in relation to one of the amendments in the Primary Industries Legislation Amendment Bill. I am quite sure that when the honourable member for Broadwater takes that information back to the league its members will be very pleased.

The honourable member for Gladstone raised a number of issues, one of which was the spraying of herbicides on, say, weeds out in the field. Once again, we really need to be sure that that chemical is sprayed in accordance with the label. The label then should also explain whether the chemical is harmful to animals. If we look at weeds and so on in the fields, we see that there are areas in which we do have large animals grazing as well.

**Mr Rowell:** This withholding provision gets over that issue.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is right.

**Mr Rowell:** It might be 14 days or whatever, but there is a withholding provision to ensure that it does not come back.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is right. I thank the honourable member.

The honourable member for Glass House was the last person to speak. Once again she spoke with great conviction, coming from a rural area—an area which certainly is involved in very important horticulture in Queensland—and many of the amendments to this bill are certainly in keeping with what is required in her electorate.

There is one more issue that I do want to raise—and this issue was raised by the Leader of the Opposition—in relation to exceptional circumstances. He also spoke at length about the deregulation of the dairy industry. I think that he and other members opposite have been sadly and badly misled by the federal Minister for Agriculture, Warren Truss. Unfortunately, he is peddling a great deal of untruths out there in the community, and I am very sad to say that the people who are suffering are the producers who are undergoing very severe drought conditions.

When exceptional circumstances were finally declared in a certain area of the Darling Downs—and I am responding to what the Leader of the Opposition said—the Department of Primary Industries supported the Agforce submission to the federal government. We provided backup information whenever it was requested. Then information came to the Department of Primary Industries that two additional part shires were also suffering the same conditions as the exceptional circumstances area. I wrote to the federal minister about three weeks ago. The Department of Primary Industries officers had been in consultation with federal agricultural officers on this issue. We found that there was absolutely no reason why exceptional circumstances provisions could not be extended to the new areas.

When NRAC contacted the Department of Primary Industries, we sent them all the relevant information. I think that was on about 6 October—well before the date that the election was called. Unfortunately, federal minister Warren Truss is hiding behind the provision that because an election has been called he cannot do a thing. Let me say this—and I want this on the record of this House: in 1998, during a caretaker period, an exceptional circumstances provision was agreed to by the then federal government—the then Howard government—and it was agreed to with the support of the federal opposition. We do have the support of the federal opposition in this case. I have spoken to Gavan O'Connor, and my officers have spoken to Gavan O'Connor, and he has given us that assurance. So Warren Truss should not hide behind the Caretaker Convention. There are farmers out there who are really suffering, and it is about time that he made a decision. And if he cannot make a decision he should get out of politics.

**Mr Rowell:** What about the independent droughted areas? Are you sure you're right up to speed with them—the independent droughted areas?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Is the member talking about the state area or the federal area?

**Mr Rowell** interjected.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We have local drought committees that make recommendations to the Department of Primary Industries.

**Mr Rowell:** They're loaded by DPI staff.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is not the information that I have received.

**Mr Rowell:** We have letters that show this.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will check.

**Mr Rowell:** The rural people who are on those independent drought committees are not getting a fair deal.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will check.

I will now respond to the member for Gladstone's query about why there is not a deemed approval. A deemed approval may have adverse consequences for third parties. CPBs, or cane production boards, approve the cancellation or transfer of cane production areas. Often this cane production area is used on land subject to a mortgage. A deemed approval may deprive the mortgagee of rights without an opportunity for consultation. A deemed refusal enables a grower to appeal that refusal. This gives the grower the right to take the matter further without compromising the rights of others. This amendment has been introduced to the sugar act basically after consultation with growers throughout Queensland. They wanted this provision included, and this is the best way we thought that we could do it, by including that provision.

So with those few words, I thank once again all honourable members for their contributions.

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