



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

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AGRICULTURAL AND VETERINARY CHEMICALS [QUEENSLAND] AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (3.47 p.m.), in reply: At the outset, I thank all honourable members for their contributions to this debate. Whereas the bill is of a rather technical nature and basically mirrors legislation that has been enacted state-wide through all the jurisdictions in Australia and the Commonwealth, it is a very important piece of legislation for Queensland. I note the opposition's support for the bill, as I have noted the support for it from honourable members on the government side, as well.

What will this bill do? This bill will ensure that the basis of the conferral of functions and powers on Commonwealth authorities and officers as part of the national registration scheme for agricultural and veterinary chemicals is not put at risk due to that recent High Court decision. The NRA, in an intergovernmental legislative scheme with the states and territories, operates a uniform national system for evaluation, registration and regulation of agricultural and veterinary chemicals known as the national registration scheme. In Queensland, the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Queensland) Act 1994 adopts the schedule to the Commonwealth's Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals Code Act 1994 as the Agvet Code of Queensland.

There were some interesting contributions. The issue of chemical usage is very important—one to which I will allude during the conclusion to my summation of honourable members' contributions. The issue of chemical usage is very important not only from an industry's perspective but, more importantly, from a community point of view. The Queensland government takes this very seriously. It is also a matter that our primary industries take seriously, as well.

I refer to contributions made by various members. The honourable member for Hinchinbrook raised a number of issues. He raised the issue of the review of the Queensland Agricultural Chemicals Distribution Control Act. As members present would know, many speakers' comments strayed from the contents of the legislation. As I said earlier, it is a pretty technical bill, but I was very pleased with your lenience, Mr Deputy Speaker Poole, during the debate. I will respond to honourable members even though they spoke to issues not relevant to the piece of legislation before the House.

As the honourable member for Hinchinbrook would know, the act has been reviewed in line with national competition policy on the harmonisation of controls of use. I am advised that the Department of Primary Industries has been awaiting agreement from the Commonwealth on how this harmonisation of the controls of use can be achieved. While agreement has still not been reached with the Commonwealth, it is now planned that Queensland should go ahead with its original proposal on controls of use, which is consistent with national competition policy.

The member for Hinchinbrook also commented about whether the Hughes case dealt with issues of validity of the national registration scheme. The Hughes case did not deal specifically with NRS but with Corporations Law. The relevance of the case is found as it casts doubt about cooperative schemes, of which the NRS is one. The amendments, in conjunction with the Co-operative Schemes (Administrative Actions) Bill, are designed to ensure that the NRS is capable of withstanding any constitutional attack.

The other important issue the honourable member raised related to whether the DPI was consulted on this piece of legislation. I have been informed by my departmental officers that the amendments were drafted by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General in consultation with my

department. Since the Minister for Primary Industries is introducing the bill to parliament, it is customary not to list DPI as a department consulted. In effect, this would be like saying that I had consulted with myself. Quite obviously there was consultation. At the end of the day, as I said earlier, the department was not listed because I am introducing a bill of a similar nature.

I refer to the comments of the member for Gladstone in relation to receipt and disposal of dangerous chemicals. She made quite valid points. The member knows that the point is always where the money is going to come from. I understand that government has long recognised the need to ensure the proper and careful handling of chemicals and their disposal. In relation to disposal, I understand that the EPA has in place chemical collection programs that allow the community to dispose of chemicals responsibly and properly. I will certainly, as the honourable member did suggest, pass on her comments to the minister responsible for the EPA.

The honourable members for Mulgrave, Charters Towers and Burdekin spoke quite succinctly to the contents of the bill. They certainly showed a very good understanding of the bill. I thank them for their contributions. The honourable member for Kawana did raise a number of issues a little outside the scope of the bill. Seeing as this was a wide-ranging debate I was very keen to listen to the comments made by him. One of the points raised related to the shire council on which he served and the dreadful issue of water weeds. Water weeds, of course, permeate many of our water systems state wide. I refer the honourable member to the members for Charters Towers and Burdekin. There is a wonderful initiative in Charters Towers and Burdekin called the rangelands-reef initiative, to which the state government has contributed \$3 million. It is about ensuring the cleaning up of our waterways, especially of the Burdekin system. Part of that contribution was the Department of Primary Industries purchasing a water weed harvester for the Burdekin Shire Council. We did trial this water weed harvester—incidentally, it is manufactured in the electorate of Algeester, in Archerfield—at Payards Lagoon. It proved to be very successful. That lagoon is completely clear of all water weeds. Follow-up treatment has also been carried out. To all intents and purposes, at the end of the day Payards Lagoon has now become a haven for families to come and spend a nice Sunday afternoon.

I note the member for Burdekin nodding his head. He attended when the Premier was there after a community cabinet meeting to make that announcement with me. Of course, the members for Burdekin and Charters Towers are very carefully monitoring and scrutinising the progress of the Burdekin's rangelands-reef initiative. I refer the honourable member to those two members for further information on the water weed harvester.

Mr Rodgers: The harvester will be a great asset for the Burdekin and the north to do that sort of work.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I thank the honourable member for his comment, his observation, his great assistance and his great participation in this scheme.

The member for Indooroopilly certainly did speak at some length on the contents of the bill and of his experiences in Ireland. He compared what happens there with what happens here. It was very interesting, from my point of view, to listen to his comments. Of course, the honourable member for Kallangur, who is a person with a very keen interest in primary industries, was certainly able to provide input into the debate on this legislation in a manner that I believe only he could do, and I thank him for his contribution.

I mentioned at the outset that I wanted to make a couple of comments about chemical usage in Queensland. I will address chemical usage and the consumer end of things—how I believe consumers feel about the use of chemicals in the foods they consume. The very existence of our agricultural industries is dependent on the consumers who buy their product. Therefore, the future of agriculture is closely linked to future consumer buying trends. The buying trends of today's consumers are increasingly evident. I ask all honourable members to listen to this and think things through. Consumers want more convenience, more taste and more eating out, and they are more demanding about food safety, health and nutritional aspects. Does that satisfy honourable members?

Opposition members: Hear, hear!

Mr PALASZCZUK: Consumers are also becoming more demanding about the ethical and environmental credentials of what they are buying. Tomorrow's consumers will want to know the true environmental cost of putting that food on the plate. We believe that terms, as the honourable member for Kallangur mentioned, such as 'farming with a minimal footprint' will be very important to tomorrow's consumers. 'Minimal footprint' does not just mean no future impact. Consumers will value production methods that regenerate the soil, making up for past impact. This will be achieved through the development of sustainable farming systems that optimise yields while improving the health of our landscape. Water quality, as the member for Indooroopilly mentioned, and soil health are obviously two essential components of a healthy landscape. Inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides impact on both water quality and soil health.

The path to sustainable farming is important and in many ways it will be never ending. The important message is that we are on the path and we are moving forward. In Queensland I believe that industry and government have made substantial gains. The Department of Primary Industries here in Queensland is undertaking research that addresses broad soil health issues and sustainability; for example, the development and the implementation of nutrient monitoring systems have enabled industries to maintain productivity and also reduce fertiliser inputs. This approach is typified by recent advances in the banana industry, which has seen a 40 per cent reduction in nitrogen fertiliser input, thereby reducing the potential for leaching into streams and watercourses.

In addition to reducing the amount of fertiliser, it is important to reduce the impact of the fertiliser used by making it more environmentally friendly. Organic fertilisers, biological control methods such as exclusion netting, non-toxic bait sprays, biopesticides and soil balance technologies will be an integral part of tomorrow's ethical production systems. These systems will be validated by rigorous third-party accreditation that will always award eco-labelling status to products. This is the future of agriculture and the environment, a future where we need to get smarter to meet consumer demands for environmentally safe food. With those comments, I once again thank all honourable members for their contributions. I also thank the opposition for its support of the legislation.
