



Speech by

KAREN STRUTHERS

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Hansard 13 December 2001

PEST MANAGEMENT BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Algeria—ALP) (2.53 p.m.): I have witnessed the extensive damage to homes at Forest Lake in my electorate as a result of shonky pest control operators. I am, therefore, very encouraged by the provisions in this bill. Forest Lake is a unique and wonderful community and it was a shame to see the unfair stigma attached to that community during the publicity surrounding the termite issue. That problem has certainly been taken well in hand now and those residents can feel quite relieved that their community continues to enjoy a good reputation.

Mr Seeney: Where's Forest Lake?

Ms STRUTHERS: In the electorate of Algeria—a great electorate!

Anxious home owners invited me to witness first-hand the termite damage to their homes. I saw many damaged load-bearing posts and beams; I saw architraves around windows where it was possible to put a finger through the paint and there was nothing behind it. Many of those families were living with a great deal of anxiety, wondering what damage was hidden behind the walls. Termite damage caused a lot of problems for those families, so it is great to see the provisions proposed in this bill.

I was struck by the fact that many Forest Lake residents were living with a false sense of security. They had bought their homes very recently, believing they had been treated for termites. They even had bits of paper saying the homes had been treated. As matters developed, it became clear that some of the pest control operators were diluting their chemicals. A company by the name of Guardian was one such operator. It was investigated by the Building Services Authority and was later prosecuted. That sent an important message to the industry that shonky operators will not be tolerated.

I was also struck by the fact that many residents were not aware that the chemical and physical barriers around their homes had to be maintained. They did not know that if landscaping was placed around the home which blocked the weep holes and other such things, it in fact rendered the barriers ineffective. That situation has resulted in a strong focus on the need not only for tighter regulation of the industry—which this bill tackles—but also for greater community awareness. I was pleased to play a role and to work with industry players, with the BSA and with families in that area to actually get three very positive strategies occurring. One of those was a greater focus on state-wide awareness. The BSA produced some wonderful brochures and videos. There were TV ads, there was some suggestion that there might have been a message on the city council rate notices and things, alerting people to the fact that they needed to have a treatment done every 12 months or so. So, a lot of positive things came out of the adversity that they were experiencing.

But the important thing was the need for strengthening of the licensing system. I support the measures in this bill to strengthen the licensing system for pest management technicians, requiring technicians to hold new national competency based standards for pest management. There will also be criminal checks done to see if people have past criminal offences and a past revocation of their licence. All of that is very important for the industry and sends a very strong message to the industry that the sort of practices Guardian was prosecuted for will not be tolerated. Some good certainly came out of that. I think there are many people in that area who are still worried, so we need to maintain the vigilance, maintain the community awareness and make sure we police these standards.

I want to personally thank the members of the BSA I worked with during that difficult time: former CEO Matt Miller, Ray Potts and Ian White were all very helpful in working with people in that

Forest Lake community. They certainly took our concerns seriously. Many members of the House too would remember Davo—Bruce Davidson from the National Party, the former member for Noosa. I actually want to thank Davo because he gave bipartisan support to me on that local issue. He was the opposition spokesperson on fair trading and there were people going to him to say the government was not doing enough. He in fact realised that the government was taking action. He would talk to me about it and say, 'Look, I've got these concerns but I'm with you all the way. You're trying to get something done. Good on you. You have my support.' Dear old Davo did the right thing and I really appreciate that bipartisan support.

The residents of Forest Lake who acted responsibly certainly deserve a big thank you. There was a lot of media attention and a lot of hysteria to whip this issue up. Most of the families and individuals I met with were very responsible and worked with me very well in solving that problem in Forest Lake. My thanks go to them. I commend the Health Minister and her departmental officers for bringing in these new standards and other provisions within this bill. It certainly will go a long way towards getting rid of the critters that have caused harm in my electorate and I commend her for that.
