



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

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ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.47 p.m.): Today I rise to speak in debate on the Animal Care and Protection Bill because it is an important bill for this parliament to consider, particularly for those people who believe that the care and protection of animals is one of the most important things in our lives. Animals rely upon human beings for that care and protection. This bill has been in the making for a long time. Its formulation commenced almost 15 years ago. It was initially undertaken to a large extent by Tom Burns when he first came to this parliament, and when we were in government from 1996 to 1998 it was virtually almost ready. One reason the opposition is supporting the bill before the House today is that in many ways it is close to a mirror image of the legislation we had prepared.

When talking philosophically about the care of animals, there are two basic areas. One is the harvesting of animals in commercial farming operations—that is, the rearing and so forth. That process needs to be done in a practical but caring way. It should always be done humanely. All of the practices involved with that process should be aimed at providing the animal with comfort, good health, good nutrition and handling that is free of fear—that is, handling that, to every possible extent, is comfortable and stress free. However, during the preparation of bills such as this the opposition and the government share the belief that we have to be sensible in dealing with particular farming practices in vast areas, but the uppermost principle has to be the comfort and care of the animal so that the animal has a comfortable and enjoyable life. Animals should be provided with shade, water and feed. Any handling processes during that time should be done in a very humane and well organised way. I think that is one of the important things. I was pleased to hear some other people speaking about that.

Mention has been made of drought conditions. Some conditions are very difficult to handle, for example floods. Issues arising from floods can appear quickly—they can come about overnight—and they can make life very difficult for farming communities, particularly their animals, if farmers cannot get livestock off the river flats or out of other areas prone to water.

We have to be sensible about looking after the animals, but it does take some planning. It is necessary for people, wherever possible, to have avenues to get animals to higher ground. It is important in droughted areas to have, where possible and practical, a plan that takes into account the possibility of drought. It may allow for paddocks to be spelled and rested in good seasons so that there is a body of feed or mulga or for spare hill paddocks that have a little extra to take animals for a period of time.

It is important to have a plan for silage or round bales, a plan for agistment, a plan for transport or a plan to sell off if necessary. This is where some of the modern planning systems, particularly within the DPI, can be used. Some of the computer systems available can add to the normal planning a farmer might do to determine what he would do in certain situations. Systems that help people to make those crucial management decisions are good—before they get to the end of their tethers and before they get to the point of desperation and are unable to make the next move—not only for the proper operation of those properties but also for the welfare of the animals. It is good to see that thought has been put into that, into the humane treatment of animals and into the sensible and economically sound way of carrying out the necessary practices of cutting cattle, spaying and so forth.

I ask the minister to address my next point in his reply to the debate. I was approached by some people I know from my days of running showgrounds in relation to rodeos. In referring to the draft

bill—at the time they did not have the final version of the bill—they spoke about using some sense in the way in which organisers for rodeos are appointed. I understand that this bill allows for that. There will be an organiser, and I take it that the organiser is the person who then has responsibility for ensuring all aspects of good care of those animals and ensuring that the codes of practice and so on are adhered to.

Mr Palaszczuk: That will be in the code and the code will be developed in consultation. We will be looking for a national code.

Mr HORAN: The point I make is that there are very professional, longstanding contractors who do the entire process themselves. They are contracted by a show society, a rodeo group or whatever. They are generally people who breed their own horses or breed their own cattle for the bulls in many instances. They virtually love those animals.

A friend owned the bucking horse of the year and it was his favourite pet. That was old Cyclone, and the family loved him. Some of those horses still win those titles in their 20s. Their best years are 12 to 21, but many go longer. You can put a halter on those horses and lead them into a truck. They are well fed, well groomed, well looked after and so forth.

In developing that code, whether through the APRA or the other rodeo associations, it is important to recognise these people with their long years of experience and their affinity with their animals. In many ways these animals are a bit like footballers. They are well trained to do what they do. They like it, but they like the game to be over so that they can get back in the truck and go home. I would like the minister to comment on those points. I ask the minister to note the practical aspects I have commented on. All governments involved in the preparation of this legislation have had a good look at those aspects.

In relation to drought the minister made some comments yesterday, as did I, about his role as minister and the role of the federal government. Everyone has to work cooperatively. I saw the way in which the exceptional circumstances regulations, which had been put in place some years before by the state and federal governments of the day, were dealt with. Warren Truss worked hard to include the information the department had a responsibility for—

Mr Palaszczuk: No.

Mr HORAN: Just yesterday the minister spoke about how the government helped Agforce. The minister has to be part of the scene if he wants to be a team player and hop in and help the people. He has to use what facilities he has—or what is left after all the job losses and so forth.

Mr Palaszczuk: I explained that.

Mr HORAN: There are 550 positions gone, and some of them are positions forgone that were promised and never delivered.

From a review conducted in 1999 the minister secured cabinet approval to scrap the state government's Drought Relief Assistance Scheme by 2002 and in August 2000 he handed \$57.7 million from the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority reserves to the Queensland Treasury. So the government's own scheme was very limited.

It is important to have on the independent local committees a good balance of people that can make decisions. There were reports last year of too many people from the DPI being on some of those committees and reports of them voting against the area being drought declared while the locals were voting for it. I think there needs to be balance, because it is also an issue of animal welfare. Some of the arrangements that pertain to drought declarations, such as assistance with fodder, transport and so forth, are crucial to animal welfare and are crucial to decision making and the drought declaration process.

I would like the minister to take note of the points I have made and to work closely with the federal government in trying to get things such as exceptional circumstances arrangements through. Time is of the essence. The minister knows that the arrangements put in place by state and federal governments meant that they had to have certain information for the NRAC committee to be able to make the decision. I know how hard Warren Truss worked to get that and to make it fit within the guidelines for those people.

The opposition supports this bill. A lot of work has been done by a number of governments, including the coalition government, over the past decade or more. I am of the sincere hope that this bill will mean that the handling of and dealing with animals will remain practical. Also, I hope we will always abide by the principle of being humane and making the lot and life of animals comfortable and enjoyable.
