



Speech by

Mr N. ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard 17 October 2001

ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION BILL

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (12.30 p.m.): Firstly, I congratulate the minister on the introduction of this legislation for the protection of animals, because it is a significant departure from the previously quite narrow approach to protecting animals under the current Animals Protection Act 1925. In common with many members, I have a particular interest in this animal welfare bill. As is the case with many households, mine is a household of two pets, consisting of Alice the black cat and Paddy the Maltese-Shih tzu cross. As a result I want to speak mainly about the impact that this new bill will have on the domestic animals in the state.

Mr Mickel: Tell us about horseracing again.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: I might leave horseracing out of this debate today, because I have spoken about it in this place many times before. The member would be aware that I was a track work rider and treated horses very humanely during that period of working with them.

I think it is fair to say that a hallmark of a decent and civilised society is how we care for the most vulnerable in the community and, more particularly, those whose welfare and quality of life is almost totally dependent on our actions and goodwill. I think that this applies particularly in the case of animals in domestic and obviously commercial and rural situations.

This bill introduces a new approach to protecting animal welfare, and it is to be applauded. It focuses on a preventive and educative approach backed up by strong sanctions against those who inflict cruelty or breach their duties to properly look after the animals in their care. As a general rule, the old approach was based very much on identifying aspects of cruelty before prosecution could be progressed. The new legislation fosters a more proactive involvement of both the department and the RSPCA in encouraging and supporting better practices in the community and in industry for the treatment of animals. It does this in a number of ways but most particularly by imposing a very specific duty of care on the animals that are being looked after by individuals or organisations. That duty of care is based on five principles, which were established by the United Kingdom Farm Animal Welfare Council in the 1980s, which were: freedom from hunger and thirst; freedom from discomfort; freedom from pain, injury and disease; freedom to express normal behaviour; and freedom from fear and distress.

Another significant change in the legislation is the ability of animal welfare inspectors to issue written animal welfare directions, which will go a long way towards improving the overall management of animals in both domestic and commercial situations. Most importantly, animal welfare inspectors will be able to act before acts of cruelty occur, which is a significant departure from the current act. As the old adage says, prevention is better than cure.

At this point I acknowledge the work that the RSPCA has undertaken over many, many years in looking after and pursuing the welfare of animals in the community. The RSPCA played a significant role under the current act and will continue to play a significant role under this new legislation. A significant improvement to the current situation is that, in addition to the RSPCA powers and inspectorate duties, the Department of Primary Industries will also be a key agency in enforcing the provisions of the act. That will provide an additional 120 people who will be available for inspectorate duties and enforcement throughout the state.

Two other initiatives in the bill include the establishment of codes of practice, which has been mentioned by a number of speakers, and also the establishment of an animal welfare advisory committee. The bill also proposes a significant enhancement to penalties and offences, and a number of new penalties have been introduced. The new provision of a breach of duty of care attracts a fine of up to \$22,500 or one year in imprisonment, and the failure to comply with an animal welfare directive attracts a penalty of up to \$7,500 or potentially one year in imprisonment. Additionally, penalties for existing offences have been beefed up considerably. The penalty for the cruelty offence has been increased from \$1,500 and six months imprisonment to a potential penalty of \$75,000 and two years imprisonment.

I want to recognise the role that local authorities play in improving the welfare of animals, particularly in domestic situations, and of the Brisbane City Council in cleaning up the streets over recent years. By strong enforcement and encouragement, we have almost rid ourselves, in the local suburbs in Brisbane at least, of the perennial problem of dogs roaming the streets and causing all sorts of difficulties, including health and environment problems in public places, safety problems on our roads, and also difficulties with savage dogs. In the past some quite horrific incidents have occurred. Unfortunately, some still occur when dogs get out or are released from their enclosures.

I want to also recognise the work that is going on in my own electorate, initiated largely by Councillor Kim Flesser, who is a good friend of mine and a very active councillor in my local area, in promoting good recreational outlets for dogs in the community, in particular the provision of off-leash dog areas. I am pleased to say that the first and only off-leash dog swimming area in Queensland is in my electorate. It has been provided by the Brisbane City Council, through the efforts of Councillor Kim Flesser, at Tuckeroo Park, which is on the way to Nudgee Beach. That first is soon to be complemented by another first in Queensland—and I believe Australia—and that is the dog equivalent of Disneyland, which is a new facility called Doggy World in my electorate to be opened by Councillor Kim Flesser by the staging of a dogs breakfast at Tuckeroo Park on Saturday, 27 October, between the hours of 9 and 11.30.

Mr Schwarten: That's an old saying, that one—you look like a dog's breakfast.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: That is right. The dogs breakfast is intended to officially launch Doggy World. It is being sponsored by a sausage sizzle provided by the Boondall Lions Club and a number of local vets and pet suppliers within the local area.

Ms Spence: Will there be doggies in the window?

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: There will be doggies in the window. Doggy World is defined as a low-level dog obedience and exercise course located at Tuckeroo Park, which, for the members' information, is located on the road to Nudgee Beach.

Councillor Flesser has very proudly proclaimed—and I am sure that the Premier will not mind me advising the House of this—that the off-leash dog swimming area is Queensland's, and Australia's, first legal nude bathing area for dogs. I invite people to come to the dogs breakfast on Saturday, 27 October and to bring their dogs, which are welcome to swim in the nude at the off-leash dog swimming area. Councillor Flesser has indicated very strongly that owners are to ensure that their dogs do not engage in lewd behaviour, because it will be frowned upon. Owners are requested to ensure that their dogs keep their paws to themselves while using these facilities.

Mr Schwarten: Is the policy going to be, 'No collar, no start'?

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: No collar, no swim; I think that is a fair policy. I am pleased to stand and support this bill. I congratulate the minister once again. Again, I extend an invitation to the minister, members and any dog owners and dog lovers to attend the dogs breakfast to officially launch Doggy World at Tuckeroo Park on the way to Nudgee Beach on Saturday, 27 October. I commend the bill to the House.
