



Speech by

RONAN LEE

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

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ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION BILL

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (12.51 p.m.): It is a very great honour to rise in support of the Animal Care and Protection Bill 2001. At the outset, can I say that I believe this is the most advanced piece of legislation to hit the floor of the parliament this year and also that it sets the benchmark for this type of legislation in Australia. I believe it is a great credit to the minister and his department. I am also disappointed that no Liberal Party members saw fit to participate in this part of the debate.

Such is the sophistication of the Animal Care and Protection Bill that other states are already looking at copying large parts of it. I believe that the Animal Protection Act 1925 not only is outdated but also falls well short of setting acceptable standards of care and protection for animals.

The Animal Care and Protection Bill makes the necessary amendments and places a greater emphasis on commonsense in animal care issues. The bill establishes a clearly defined duty of care for the protection of animals. The aim of the bill is not to punish; it is to educate animal owners as to the acceptable standards of caring for their pets and also their working animals.

The forethought and industry expertise that went into the creation of this bill will benefit many in this area. For the past three years, Chelmer, a suburb in my electorate, has been plagued by the horrific crime of dog baiting. I have spoken previously in the House about this subject.

When I was elected in February, I was astounded that dog owners, residents and, perhaps more seriously, parents in Chelmer were living in fear that their loved ones would be targeted next. Over a three-year period, about six dogs have been killed and many others have fallen violently ill because of somebody throwing baited dog food into people's yards.

However, what really amazed me was that even though the residents had sent numerous letters to their local representatives—their councillor and state and federal members of parliament—I do not believe that the issue was treated with the gravity that it clearly deserved. Some of the responses from the then local representatives bordered on the comical. One response stated—

What a dreadful story you tell. If only you had a Neighbourhood Watch to look out for you.

But there was no real action at all. The situation that was allowed to persist in Chelmer was a complete dog's breakfast. It was this attitude from their local representatives that saw the problem continue over a three-year period, during which time a number of other dogs were murdered. I believe those pet killings could have been avoided.

This is why I am very proud of the manner in which our Labor government deals with animal welfare issues. After becoming aware of the dog baiting problem in Chelmer, I held a public forum with the RSPCA, the police and over 50 local residents. Since this time, the police have conducted a thorough investigation of the crimes, and we are now awaiting lab results so that we, hopefully, will be in a position to lay charges.

I am delighted that many people in my electorate own and care for dogs. Early in the morning and late in the afternoon it is a treat to see people walking their dogs in areas such as St Lucia, Taringa, Indooroopilly, Fig Tree Pocket, Chelmer, Graceville and Sherwood. It is plain to see that dogs and, for that matter, animals in general make great companions for adults and children. These animals deserve the right to live without fear and cruelty.

That is why I think it is important that we go that step further and create legislation of this quality which imposes a clear duty of care on the guardians of all animals. This bill makes it perfectly clear to people such as the dog biter in my electorate that this is a very serious crime and will not be tolerated by our government.

Section 36 of the bill states clearly that 'a person must not, with the intention of injuring or killing any animal, lay a bait or a substance that is harmful or poisonous to any animal'. The maximum penalty for such an individual offence is 300 penalty units or one year's imprisonment. This illustrates that crimes towards animals of this nature are simply not acceptable. Baiting animals is not only inhumane, it is sick and it compromises the safety of small children playing in their yards.

I am delighted with this bill, because it sends a clear message that baiting and cruelty to animals in general will simply not be tolerated. I also applaud this bill for its educational direction towards animal welfare and protection. The penalties alone will not be the way that we deter even the most sinister-minded people from being cruel to animals. And that is why I am so pleased that there is an education component in the bill.

The bill also outlines our government's commitment to animal welfare and protection. Unlike the existing legislation, which deals with cruelty only after it has occurred, the Animal Care and Protection Bill sets out to detect animal cruelty and remedy the situation. This unwavering commitment to animal welfare does not only extend to pets, working animals and farmed animals. I am proud to mention that it also extends to animals used for scientific purposes. I believe that the DPI is heading in the right direction by setting clear and consistent requirements for the registration of scientific users of animals.

I have a very large university, the University of Queensland, in my electorate. I am happy to say that the registration of scientific users of animals will be done in a rational and realistic manner. For example, I believe it warrants mentioning that the department has had the foresight to make it necessary for university lecturers conducting experiments on animals with students present to be registered. However, the students themselves are not required to be registered while under the supervision of a registered lecturer. Hefty penalties will be incurred for operating outside these guidelines.

I wish also to make a point about the animal welfare directions that have been implemented for use when an animal's welfare is compromised. This alleviates the need for up-front prosecution and purposefully serves to educate before further steps are taken.

It is rare that a bill of this magnitude gains cross-industry support. I believe it is a testimony to the consultation processes conducted over the past few years by the Department of Primary Industries that the bill we have before us carries the support of animal welfare organisations such as the RSPCA. Groups like the RSPCA do a great job in our community. Later this month the RSPCA in Fairfield will be holding an open day. It will be a great opportunity for all of the mums and dads to take along their children, visit the animals and perhaps adopt a cat or dog. I have always been impressed by the staff and the volunteers at the RSPCA. I am very grateful for the help they gave me in choosing my two pet cats.

Because of the nature of the work conducted by the RSPCA, fundraising plays a particularly important role for it. I wish to make special mention of one group that does a tremendous job for the community and also helps raise some much-needed funds for the RSPCA's care of animals. The Sherwood RSPCA thrift shop has a large number of volunteers who do an absolutely wonderful job. I am also pleased to announce that, as part of the International Year of the Volunteer, they are to be presented with an award. I wish particularly to mention Marg Chittick, and I seek leave to incorporate into *Hansard* the names of the other hardworking volunteers.

Leave granted.

Jim Chittick, Maree Jones, Roger Whitling, Sandra Proctor, Beth Moller, Emily Palmer, Jean Illingworth, Kay Anderson, Dianna Speed, James Dillon, Joyce Burke, Glenda Lawn, Felicity Stone, James Burke and Ros Cameron.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Mr LEE: The Animal Care and Protection Bill legislates a commonsense approach to the protection of animals, and the creation of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee will allow for ongoing committee input into issues that arise from time to time. The DPI's commitment to engage the expertise of independent animal welfare groups is great to see and it demonstrates that the department really is putting animals' welfare first.

In contemporary society the focus of animal welfare issues changes on a regular basis. I feel that it is paramount to create a body such as the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to deal with issues on a rolling basis. It is this sort of forethought that is the result of extensive consultation and sets an example to similar departments throughout Australia. Again, this provides a great example of the rationality used in the creation of this bill. Providing a working group of this nature allows for changes to the legislation to be made when necessary.

Therefore, it is without hesitation that I commend this bill to the House. It is commonsense made law. The Animal Care and Protection Bill has established a set of well consulted and rational guidelines that set the minimum standards for animal care and protection. I believe that I join my fellow parliamentary colleagues when I say that I am very proud to be part of a government that is prepared to go that one step further—a government that is not ashamed to put equality first and is preparing to tackle issues dealing with cruelty. I commend the bill to the House.
