



Speech by

CARRYN SULLIVAN

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

Hansard 8 August 2002

DRUGS MISUSE AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (4.14 p.m.): The Drugs Misuse Amendment Bill 2002 is a very important and natural extension of existing sections of the act that were established to allow the trial of planting and harvesting cannabis sativa for commercial fibre production. Trials have been running for the past four years in several Australian states and now there is the opportunity to take full advantage of an ever-growing world market.

Interest has been expressed from Canada, the USA and Europe in reviving hemp industries, with large-scale research projects under way in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany to develop viable markets. France has a continuing hemp processing industry while Northern Ireland has blended up to 40 per cent hemp with flax successfully, and its only problem is a constant source of supply. We cannot afford to miss the boat.

Hemp has been around for a long time. It is the earliest known woven fabric, dating back to the eighth millennium—between 8000 and 7000 BC. For more than 1000 years BC up until 1183 AD hemp was the biggest and most important agricultural crop for many civilisations. It was produced in many countries until it was phased out or banned in the 20th century. It was replaced by fossil fuels, timber, synthetics and petrochemicals, which was a disastrous decision for the environment and for what is arguably the earth's most primary renewable and useful resource.

Until about 1800, hemp seed oil was the most consumed lighting oil in the world. Between 70 per cent and 90 per cent of all cordage was made from hemp until 1937. For thousands of years, good paints and varnishes were made with hemp seed oil. For eons, the art canvas was made of hemp. The paintings of such greats as Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Gainsborough were mostly painted on them.

Ms Keech: Wish I owned one of those.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I also wish I owned one. Today's uses are so varied, including building and construction materials, carpet backing, PVC piping and paints. In fact, with the uses that I have just mentioned I could imagine an entire house being built with hemp. Obviously, the member for Glass House would be very happy to live in such a house—with her husband, of course.

Other uses include insulation products, paper and paper products, organic reinforcement and matting for erosion control, clothes and rope and twine. I am not the only Sullivan who has spoken on the virtues of hemp. In March 1998, my husband, Jon, while speaking to the Police and Other Legislation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, supported the trials of commercial hemp growing in Queensland.

Ms Keech: He was a great member.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: He was a great member. He stated that after watching an ABC documentary titled *A Billion Dollar Crop* he was interested to learn that hempseed oil is one of the best things that can be used in lowering cholesterol levels in people. That is good news for all of us. Another comment Jon made was that as a country we would benefit from having an additional crop available to our rural producers. It is a sturdy and fast-growing crop and in Australia a yield of 10 tonnes per hectare of dry hemp stalks is expected where rainfall is in reasonable supply. It is a crop that can be grown in virtually any climate or soil condition on earth. It needs no chemicals, has few weed or insect enemies

except those who wish to ban it. Hemp is softer than cotton, warmer than cotton, has three times the tensile strength of cotton and is many times more durable. It may not be too long before honourable members start wearing hemp skirts and hemp suits.

Ms Keech: I'd wear it.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I am glad.

Ms Keech: We'll be sitting on hemp seats.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: As the member said, we will be sitting on hemp seats. It is very durable. Members should rest assured that they could certainly hand down anything made of hemp to their children and grandchildren. This bill will reap benefits for job growth and eventually, if hemp can be grown for biomass, it could fuel a yearly trillion-dollar energy industry, replacing fossil fuels like coal, oil, natural gas and—wait for it; it gets better—nuclear power.

Mr Cummins: How much?

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: A trillion dollars.

Mr Cummins: Not a zillion?

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Not a zillion. Biomass can be converted to methane, methanol or gasoline at a fraction of the current cost of fossil fuels. This conversion would save our atmosphere from acid rain, eliminate sulphur based smog and reverse the greenhouse effect—and probably save the planet. We are doing the right thing and I am proud to be part of a government that is heading in this direction.

Licences for the commercial growing, processing, marketing and trade of industrial hemp—which is quite distinct from the illicit drug marijuana—will be strictly monitored and anyone applying for a licence will be stringently scrutinised. Licence fees will cover criminal checks, regular site inspections, conduct audits of records and the tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, sampling of plants to ensure that levels do not exceed legal standards. Only those persons holding either a research and/or a growers licence will be authorised to deal with cannabis sativa in certain ways. This is not a new industry but a revival of an ancient one. It will re-establish the traditional production of hemp, which two centuries ago was the most popular textile fibre in use. I thank the minister and his staff for the introduction of this bill and commend it to the House.
