



Speech by

**Mr D. BRISKEY**

**MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND**

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Hansard 1 August 2002

### **ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr BRISKEY** (Cleveland—ALP) (5.55 p.m.): This tough new legislation has been designed to deal with the possibility of outbreaks of devastating animal and plant diseases such as foot-and-mouth and mad cow disease. As members would no doubt be aware, an outbreak of one of these diseases in Australia has the potential to cost us billions of dollars in export revenue and thousands of jobs. It is vital that we do everything we can to prevent these diseases in the first place. We need a whole-of-government plan to control and eradicate them should there ever be an outbreak.

The bill seeks to amend key provisions within a number of existing acts and to introduce vastly increased penalties. This new legislation is a result of a number of reviews by government animal health authorities across Australia that recognised that the seriousness of the issue needs to be reflected in the penalties. The government is serious about providing appropriate deterrents to practices which have the potential to give rise to an outbreak of foot-and-mouth or BSE. This legislation does just that. Many penalties under the Stock Act and the Exotic Diseases in Animals Act have been increased by more than 1,000 per cent. The general penalty for swill feeding—for example, the feeding of foodstuffs containing meat or other animal products to livestock—is currently an inadequate 20 penalty units, or \$1,500. New penalties will be up to 1,000 penalty units, or \$75,000, or one year in prison. Penalties for corporations will be five times those of individuals.

We all have seen the devastating effect of livestock diseases in Britain, Europe, and now Japan. An outbreak of either mad cow disease or foot-and-mouth disease would have a similar impact on Queensland's regional and rural communities, animal production industries and the economy. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics estimates that an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease is likely to result in the immediate loss of export markets of beef, sheep meat, pig meat, live animals, dairy products and greasy wool. This loss for Australia is estimated at \$5.8 billion in the first year alone and does not include the cost of containment and eradication. This is a conservative estimate if we consider the effects two to five years after an outbreak. In addition, the bureau predicts a fall of 3.5 per cent in gross domestic product and a one per cent increase in unemployment. Clearly, these are predictions no government can afford to ignore.

The anthrax scare on a property in the state's south-west some months ago serves as a good example of just how easily disease can spread. In that case, the swift action of the Department of Primary Industries ensured no further detections. This legislation will vastly increase Queensland's preparedness and response to these and a number of other potentially devastating diseases. Importantly, the legislation provides a mechanism for the minister of the day to declare a pre-emptive slaughter of susceptible animals within the immediate affected area and to remove any legal and legislative impediment to carrying out such an order.

While we all hope that this component of the legislation will never have to be called upon and will remain dormant, it is vital to ensure that we can act immediately in the event that we do face a potential outbreak. Proudly, Australia is free from such exotic diseases, but recent experiences in the UK show that we can never afford to be complacent, particularly when so much is at stake. The Attorney-General's recent changes to the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, which imposes substantially higher penalties for the practice of cattle duffing, is also part of a multipronged strategy to address the potential for disease outbreak. I am sure members on both sides of this House recognise the importance of these changes and will agree that the substantial boost to penalties constitutes an important step in the fight to maintain our disease-free status. I congratulate the minister and his team on the bill and commend it to the House.

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