



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (5.58 p.m.): I doubt there would be anyone in this House—in fact, very few outside this House—who would not support the intent of this bill. Those who would not support the intent would be people whom we as a nation should be very afraid of, for they would risk all for their own selfish purpose. Often that purpose is satisfying their own whim of procuring a foreign pet or plant for their garden.

The devastation experienced in England and across Europe with the recent outbreak of FMD and its effects on the entire population of the world can never be discounted. To say all peoples 'of the world' may sound a bit of an exaggeration, but all those who heard those words, with regard to the outbreak, were affected in some way.

The landowners and near neighbours were devastated with the loss of their livestock and had to stand by and watch entire herds slaughtered. Other land-holders were not exempt as the disease travelled and consumed herds and flocks everywhere. The towns and villages were constantly shrouded with the smoke and stench of burning carcasses. The effect on businesses and jobs was enormous and the cost of the outbreak on businesses throughout Great Britain alone can still be counted. Tourists stayed away in droves, and that alone would cause any country to grind down.

It is perhaps strange that one would associate hospital services and the threat to people in Australia, who are so distant from the UK and who were totally devoid of contact with FMD with an outbreak of this disease, but the donation of blood became a casualty of this disaster. After the FMD outbreak in England and Europe, Australia banned the donation of blood from any person who had lived in Britain for more than six months between 1980 and 1986. It also endangered lives in that there were concerns that organ donors may unwittingly be the carriers of the human variant of mad cow disease.

Our clean green status is recognised throughout the world and we must be grateful for being isolated from the rest of the world in this instance. Australia is only one of five countries in the world recognised by the European Union as being very unlikely—its words—to have BSE in our herds.

Tourism is affected because people will not travel. The number of jobs lost in the domino effect of infectious diseases is phenomenal. People's fear is very real. The anthrax outbreak at Collingwood, near Wandoan, and the rapid addressing of that situation shows us how essential it is that trust when an honest chain of communication is maintained between graziers and the DPI. I believe the situation in that circumstance was handled extremely well by the department and property owners.

Pigs are a major threat with FMD and in a wet season are a major concern as they travel. We are told, 'You can't shoot in national parks' and that there is a potential to have one of the most disastrous outbreaks in extreme situations, as is in an outbreak of any infectious disease, if some exemption to shooting in national parks is not permitted during these times. Japanese encephalitis in the north is perhaps the greatest threat, with it being a real possibility with our land mass being so close to our northern neighbours. With a large and developing pig industry in the Nanango electorate, the thought of such a disease in Australia and the rapidity of its travel is very frightening.

There is life and land outside the metropolitan area, and I can only wish that members of the government who primarily live in urban areas and have only a minimal knowledge of rural areas take the time to look into the reality which is Queensland outside the cities. Growing up on a farm, although helpful, does not ensure a full knowledge of every facet of rural industries' diverse activities. Growing up in the city would not make one knowledgeable in all of the facets of city industry. I find it unacceptable when members treat rural industries as all being the same. They are not. They are wide and diverse, just as industries are in the city. Queensland is big and beautiful and, if diseases do enter it, there is the potential for an outbreak unlike any seen previously. Queensland is unique in that there is more population outside the cities than within them.

During the debate many members have referred to the effects on our meatworks and mentioned the struggle to keep our meatworks open. This is something I can relate to after the recent fight to keep the Kilcoy works open. There is no guarantee that a meatworks will remain open. If a business is viable, it will continue. If the circumstances become unreasonable and/or unsustainable, they will close. There always has to be a compromise position reached. When both parties' positions become intractable, disaster ensues.

Kilcoy was threatened, but the workers and management managed to work through their difficulties, and only time will tell whether their choices were the right ones. Up north, compromise was not reached and the result is 700 people are now out of work. Other businesses in the surrounding area might lose one or two workers, given that they relied on the custom of those 700 families.

Mr Palaszczuk: A domino effect.

Mrs PRATT: Yes, that is right.

Name-calling and laying blame does not resolve any issues. It might make someone feel good to say that someone is a rotten mongrel or whatever, but it does not solve the issue. It is to be hoped the task to reopen the Lakes Creek meatworks will be achieved to the satisfaction of all and soon.

Government members interjected.

Mrs PRATT: I must admit that I call a spade a spade.

It is always harder to open the doors once shut, as the producers and workers move on to other meatworks or move on to new careers in other industries. Therefore, a huge loss in experience is incurred to the industry's work force. That is a shame. I had to smile about the intensity of the government's attacks at the Packer's impact on 700 jobs, yet the government has put in place moves that will see thousands out of work. The distress experienced at this time will be nothing compared with the disaster that would ensue if infectious diseases were to strike and not be addressed quickly and effectively.

When FMD broke out in Zimbabwe it had the potential to cripple that small financially strapped country by curtailing its exports by almost \$80 million—a sizeable amount of money for that country, and anybody else for that matter. When these outbreaks affect other countries they affect our own beef industries, which was seen during the outbreak of mad cow disease in Japan. That saw many of our meatworks close for longer periods over the Christmas break. As was stated at the time, the concern was not so much for the availability of livestock—although we know they were limited—but about the availability of markets. Japanese beef consumption dropped by 10 per cent at that time.

The concern expressed by some scientists is that mad cow disease might already be in Australia, as it can take up to 10 years for the disease to show up in a sick animal. We have to be—and I believe it is the intent of this bill—eternally vigilant. Fire ants have shown how hard it can be to control pests once they have hitched a ride on ships' cargoes and other forms of transport. I believe a large spider once hitched a ride on a bunch of bananas.

The combined efforts of world researchers experienced in fire ants still have had limited impact, although I believe most Australians are right behind the government in wanting to rid our backyards of this biting little pest. The banana industry has been impacted with the emergence of black sigatoka and the apple industry with the fear of fire blight. There are many examples of the potential devastation diseases can cause. There are many questions that have already been asked by other honourable members, and I look forward to the minister's responses to their concerns.

I have earbashed the minister twice during this sitting on the issue of ticks and I have emphasised the importance of tick control for our export markets and to combat production losses in beef and dairy cattle. So I will not go into great depths again. In conclusion, I wish to address the issue of baiting. A letter from a constituent adversely affected by the dingo and dog baiting laws states—

I am writing to ask if it is possible to have some changes made to the Dingo and Feral dog baiting laws.

We have had problems losing stock to dogs for a number of years but this year was worse than the previous years. After spending weeks trying to shoot and trap them I made enquiries to the local councillor who told me I could get a permit to lay Strychnine baits, however permission was refused as the location where we wanted to lay the baits fell within the 2klm radius from the nearest dwelling ...

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It appears to me that the baiting laws have been written to protect straying domestic dogs or to appease their irresponsible owners and to hell with graziers trying to make a living. Our problem here isn't so much with controlled domestic dogs but with feral dogs but because there are people living 1.7 km away who may or may not have a dog we have to try to deal with the situation as best we can ...

Our farm is approximately 185 hectares and we virtually can't lay a bait on it without notifying 40 households in the area. It is not hard to see why the feral dog population has exploded in the South Burnett as most farms are only about 65 hectares and those landholders would have a hard time getting permission to lay baits.

Baits are only set for 7 days and since they may only be put out a couple of times a year it would be highly unlikely that a dog who only gets out occasionally would pick up a bait.

...

... at present you have to give 72 hours notice before laying baits but I believe that if you can lay the bait at the fresh carcass then you will be 99 percent sure of getting

the culprit ... this could be done under strict supervision by the local council or DNR ... If only dog owners would give me 72 hours warning that their dog would be out killing my stock. The government has told us that we are now responsible for controlling feral pests on our land but I think it is a bit unfair to ask us to do it with one arm tied behind our backs.

The legislation currently in place does work effectively for large rural properties, but the frustration of this constituent is experienced by many small property owners in rural areas. I ask the minister to look at the legislation once again to address difficulties experienced by those small property owners. Although this issue again covers two portfolios, I would ask the minister to pursue it on my constituent's behalf. I support the Animal and Plant Health Legislation Amendment Bill.
