



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Hansard 8 August 2002

DRUGS MISUSE AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (3.55 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Drugs Misuse Amendment Bill 2002. The purpose of this bill is to amend the Drugs Misuse Act 1986 to allow for the commercial production of industrial hemp sativa fibre and seed, commonly known as industrial hemp. Back in 1989, the act was amended to allow for controlled field trials and plant breeding for a period of three years for the purpose of assessing the potential for commercial fibre production. From the notes I have read, an extension was allowed under section 43Y of the Drugs Misuse Act, which expires on 18 December 2002.

Apparently, the recent trials produced really good results with the strains developed for the tropical and subtropical climates we experience here. The report goes on to state that these high yielding strains have the potential to place Queensland growers at a distinct competitive advantage in relation to other states and countries. With that in mind, in this ever-decreasing world of global markets, perhaps this is an avenue we should be exploiting. Throughout Queensland there has been a downturn in many industries and I would suggest that there are many who have watched the dairy industry become a struggling one, the timber industry become almost non-existent and we now find the beef industry and primarily the abattoirs facing severe hurdles with the current US quota allocations. Sugar is presently undergoing a very hard time.

Many people who have been forced out of their family line of business and chosen careers have been, and still are, searching for avenues to diversify into. At the moment it is one of my pet projects to endeavour to have an ethanol plant established in my electorate, as we have all the necessary elements to encourage the promoters of ethanol to consider that part of the South Burnett, perhaps even Kilcoy, as ideal sites. People have come to my office at various times seeking to have industrial hemp become a commercial crop. Again, I believe the Nanango electorate would be ideal for this particular crop.

The avenues open to this crop are quite diverse. I was well aware of the possibilities for rope and clothing. I have seen quite a few outfits made of hemp and, unlike the member for Southern Downs, I liked many of the items displayed. They had a cool, relaxed, lazy lifestyle look about them, which suits Queenslanders very well. What did surprise me and in fact stopped me purchasing a shirt was the price. It was not so much that it was expensive—which it was—but that I did not have enough money on me at the time. I would have loved to try it to see how it did wear because I was told that its wearing capability is extremely good. I was also well aware of the use of the product for paper and I would think that the greenies and environmentalists would embrace this as a method of protecting our forests, as we know how passionate they are about trees.

What I did not know about hemp was the use of the seed of hemp as a food item. One of the articles I discovered in my research stated that there was a projected world population growth of three billion in the next fifty years, which will inevitably bring massive rises in demands for food, which in turn places enormous pressure on our available agricultural land. This is apparently a very fast growing and sustainable crop. The article also stated that hemp has the potential to set regional Australia on the path of prosperity and to alleviate global resources in textile, food, energy and paper products—obviously the words of a person who believed very strongly in the future of hemp. If I

remember correctly, the first time I ever saw hemp cosmetic products was at Eumundi. I found the skin creams to be very good and in fact I do use them. I do not know whether they will preserve me as well as others, but perhaps I can use them forever.

With regard to the trials held, the results of the experimental plantations in New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and New Zealand were very promising. The trial in the Lockyer Valley, I believe, yielded about 18,500 tonnes per hectare in 90 days. That is enough to double traditional farm incomes made from cereal crops. One of the better attributes is that this crop is very resistant to disease. Therefore, the need to chemically treat these crops is reduced. Even more interesting was the information that if hospital garments were made from hemp and treated in a particular way they would be 100 per cent golden staph free. As all those who have encountered golden staph would attest, this possibility could only be extremely beneficial.

My research has also revealed that industrial hemp is in fact legal in all countries of the Western World except the United States. In France, even the legal tender is made out of hemp. Mention hemp and the first word that springs to most minds is marijuana and the images of people getting high. I read somewhere that, if that is what a person thinks first, they are probably still wearing flares. This is a bit of a worry because I still wear flares; they are fairly fashionable. The fact is that this industrial hemp is extremely low in THC and reports reveal that one would have to smoke 300,000 to 400,000 tonnes to get a little high. I do not believe anyone would be willing to smoke that much.

Government members interjected.

Mrs PRATT: They are only brand-new. Maybe the shop I got them from was way behind.

A government member interjected.

Mrs PRATT: Yes, they are coming back in. And hipster flares, too; I think they are coming back in. The legalisation of industrial hemp for commercial production provides for a distinction between industrial hemp where the hemp has a THC level of under three per cent and marijuana hemp where the THC level is up to 20 per cent. This bill in no way changes the fact that marijuana is an illegal substance. The penalties remain unaltered and will be enforced stringently. This crop is not a 'you-beaut, whizzbang, let's make a million dollars' crop. This is like many other crops where only hardworking people will make a reasonable living and some kind of income.

These fibre crops have traditionally been produced in countries where labour is abundant and cheap. As a result, the production systems have been simple and labour intensive. However, for commercial production in Australia, mechanisation is required at all stages of production. Anyone considering growing hemp needs to be well aware of all involved. I suggest that they do their research and do it well. To allow this emerging industry to capitalise on what appears to be a fairly promising report, we need to look at developing a commercial arm in what could potentially become Queensland's newest emerging industry. This bill allows for that. I support the bill.
