



Speech by

JAN JARRATT

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

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ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (6.33 p.m.): The Animal and Plant Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2002 amends five existing acts, with the primary objective of providing the state with powers to act decisively in the event of an outbreak of exotic animal disease or environmental pests. Importantly, many of the proposed amendments will actually lie dormant, to be activated only in the unfortunate event of a potentially devastating outbreak of exotic pests or disease. I welcome these amendments as they provide the necessary legislative power to respond appropriately to protect our important livestock industries.

Two industries of great importance to the Bowen and Whitsunday regions are wild prawn harvesting and aquaculture. Having recently attended the Australian Prawn and Barramundi Association conference in Sydney, I am keenly aware of the vast amount of effort currently being put into research and development in the field of aquaculture. One of the biggest threats to this industry is the introduction of exotic disease. White spot syndrome is one such threat.

White spot syndrome was first detected in Asia in 1992-93 and is now believed to be widely spread throughout most of the prawn growing regions of Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Acute infections of the viral syndrome result in rapid reduction of the prawn's capacity to consume food, causing the animal to become lethargic. Death within three to 10 days is inevitable. Significantly, there is currently no known method of prevention or control of this devastating disease.

This bill enhances our power to respond to a suspected outbreak of white spot syndrome or similar disease in two ways. Firstly, it extends the emergency quarantine period from two months to three months. Secondly, it confirms the power to instigate quarantine measures before a diagnosis is confirmed. This second amendment is very important, as a delay in action caused by the need to wait through a lengthy diagnosis period could conceivably result in the establishment and spread of the disease such that it would be impossible to limit or control the devastating consequences. I welcome these amendments as an important step in the protection of both our wild and our farmed prawn industries.

I am also keenly interested in the amendments aimed at protecting our livestock industries from the devastating consequences of an outbreak of diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease and BSE. It is true to say that I owe much to the beef industry as I was raised on a wheat and cattle property at North Dulacca. In fact, my father, Keith, brother, Allan, and sister-in-law, Julie, still live and work on the farm. I am actually very grateful that I was not expected to stay on the land, because it is one of the hardest lifestyles imaginable. I have great respect for the sheer perseverance of these people who, for as long as I can remember, have struggled with the elements and fickle wheat and cattle prices to stay afloat. The one thing that would certainly finish them off is an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. And they would not be alone.

Foot-and-mouth disease is a highly contagious febrile disease of cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, camels, buffalo and deer. The disease is characterised by a sudden rise in temperature followed by an eruption of blisters, usually on the mouth, feet or udder. These blisters grow larger, eventually erupting and exposing raw, eroded surfaces. The animal has difficulty eating, and standing becomes difficult due to the inflammation of the feet. While death can follow as a result of the infection, especially in young animals, the side effects may include weight loss, reduced milk production and spontaneous abortion in pregnant animals.

I am sure we all have vivid memories of the consequences of the recent outbreak of FMD in the United Kingdom. That type of outbreak in Australia would be catastrophic for our livestock industry, given the potential for feral pigs to contract the disease. Control under those circumstances would be very difficult. While we hope it never happens here, this amendment bill provides clear power for immediate response.

In the first instance, amendments to the Stock Act 1915 seek to ensure early notification of symptoms and conditions that may be associated with diseases such as FMD and BSE. Once a person is aware of the existence of prescribed indicators, they must report the incidence to an inspector. Early identification of the presence of a disease such as FMD has obvious benefit in terms of isolation and eradication of infected animals.

Further amendments to the Exotic Diseases in Animals Act 1981 provide for the expansion of classes of persons who may be appointed as stock inspectors, provision for the pre-emptive slaughter of stock to control exotic disease and removal rights to obtain injunctions. These amendments not only ensure the availability of a work force large enough to respond immediately and effectively; they also ensure that pre-emptive measures are not held up in the courts. While these measures have the potential to see stock unnecessarily slaughtered in the event of a false alarm, they also give the power to act immediately and prevent the spread of highly contagious, industry-destroying exotic diseases.

There are further amendments to various acts that all seek to obtain the same goal—the protection of our livestock industry and the protection of the incomes of people such as my father and my brother. I reiterate my earlier statement that these measures would largely lie dormant in legislation unless threat from an exotic disease were identified. I hope that we never need to enact the powers inherent in this bill, but if the time comes I feel sure that the passing of this bill will place us in a far better position to respond to the threat. I congratulate the minister and his staff and department officers who have worked exhaustively to bring this bill to fruition. I have much pleasure in commending the bill to the House.