



Speech by

**Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

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Hansard 29 October 2003

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Hon. H. PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.43 p.m.), in reply: At the outset, I thank all honourable members for their contributions. As minister, I really have been proud of the legislative program that we have been able to implement over the past five years. It really has been one of the most comprehensive and ambitious programs for primary industries in the history of Queensland and especially our Queensland parliament.

The Primary Industries and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2003 is an omnibus bill with amendments to a range of pieces of legislation. The honourable member for Tablelands, unfortunately, has the misapprehension that we are rushing through a raft of very important amendments, but this is common practice. In primary industries we do this year after year after year, and the reason why we are allowed to bring this forward is that the majority of amendments are minor amendments with only a few major amendments. That is the reason why we are able to introduce it. Otherwise, we would not be able to introduce such a huge raft of amendments.

I also want to recognise the opposition's support for the bill as was indicated by the honourable member for Hinchinbrook. The key amendments in this legislation deal with aquaculture approval processes, biosecurity and food safety—three things. I acknowledge the very strong support for the proposals in this bill in relation to aquaculture. That has come from most people who have spoken on the legislation. I believe these are positive reforms for our burgeoning aquaculture industry, and I believe the reforms are a very good balance between the industry's development and the environment.

This is reflected in our efforts to remedy the current requirement for two separate approvals from the state and the Commonwealth which has been a major constraint on the aquaculture industry development adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef. As the honourable member for Warrego rightly said, we are looking at a one-stop shop there. This bill provides the legal framework to eliminate duplications between the two governments, thereby removing the current impediments that are inhibiting significant potential for growth in the aquaculture sector. Again, I acknowledge the opposition's support for our efforts in this bill to support the development of a sustainable aquaculture industry, and I particularly acknowledge the member for Warrego's tribute to the development of aquaculture in Queensland over the past five years, which of course has been the time that I have been the Minister for Primary Industries. Thank you.

In terms of another key set of amendments to the Exotic Diseases in Animals Act 1981, these amendments come out of the experiences of the national foot and mouth disease simulation, Exercise Minotaur, which was held in September last year. These amendments will ensure authorities can respond effectively in the case of an outbreak. The effect of this amendment will be to exempt movements that pose a low risk of spreading the exotic disease from requiring a licence and apply licences to those movements that pose a risk of spreading the exotic disease.

The act is also to be amended to require persons to stop and obtain permission from an authorised person to pass through entry or exit places and checkpoints established for a restricted area, and this has come as a direct result of Exercise Minotaur. The act will also be amended to provide top-up compensation calculated at a time when the property is eligible to restock. This entitlement will occur when the premises are released from quarantine or when a restricted area is revoked. This amendment clarifies the existing situation in the act.

I am very surprised that the majority of speakers opposite spoke very passionately about the public sale of unpasteurised milk and whether it should or should not be permitted. Let me say this: it is not permitted in Queensland now. It is not legal to sell unpasteurised milk anywhere in Australia. The national food standards code specifically requires all milk to be pasteurised. No state government allows the supply of unpasteurised bovine milk or milk products.

The Food (Production) Safety Act 2000, which was unanimously passed by this parliament, has prevented the public sale of unpasteurised milk. The act passed all stages of the parliament with no opposition. The honourable members for Warrego, Gladstone and Nanango all served in that parliament. That parliament supported the ban on unpasteurised milk then, but now members who continue to serve in this parliament say people need freedom of choice. They all stood shoulder to shoulder with me in the year 2000 and the rest of the government in putting the food standards in law in the year 2000. No member—not one single member—voted against the food standards then. If those food standards were good enough for members of that parliament, why are they not good enough for members in this parliament today?

Those members critical of the amendment tonight, who sat in the parliament and supported that act, as far as I am concerned are hypocrites. The opposition here tonight is about political opportunism. What is around the corner? An election is around the corner. That is why I believe members opposite are hypocritical. Members opposite are not about food safety. They were behind us in the year 2000. The members opposite voted for it in the year 2000 and now, because there is an election looming, they have all decided to vote against it.

This amendment closes the loophole to ensure the law that we all passed here together in 2000 is effective, as we all intended it to be. The question honourable members here tonight must consider is whether they want Queenslanders to have the same food safety standards as every other person in Australia. Honourable members need to decide whether Queenslanders should have inferior food standards to all other Australians.

There are people who have consumed raw milk in this country; that is a fact. There is information from Queensland Health that there have been several outbreaks of food-borne illnesses associated with the consumption of raw cow's milk since 1997. In Queensland in 2001 there were eight cases of cryptosporidium poisoning on the Sunshine Coast linked with the consumption of unpasteurised milk. The member for Gladstone said she agreed with the motives of this legislation. She says a standard should be set. Well, there is a standard. It is called the national standard. We have urged people who do not agree with the national standard to apply to FSANZ to have it changed. Pasteurisation, on the other hand, ensures a safe milk supply for everyone.

If a person inadvertently consumes unpasteurised milk, say a child—taking up the member for Lockyer's point that babies cannot read labels—and that child becomes seriously ill and hospitalised, what would the position of honourable members opposite be? The National Party spokesperson for Primary Industries, who is not here tonight because he has another engagement, conceded a number of things about unpasteurised milk. He said in his speech—

For health reasons there is a strong determination that the best option available is to pasteurise milk. Pasteurisation destroys harmful bacteria such as salmonella, Campylobacter and pathogens such as Escherichia coli, which may be present in raw, unpasteurised milk. These bacteria are responsible for a large proportion of food-borne illnesses in Australia and New Zealand.

However, whilst I acknowledge the arguments of raw milk components, I also recognise that the government has a responsibility to protect the public health and safety of the community as a whole. It is a Food Standards Australia New Zealand, FSANZ—a bi-national, independent statutory authority—that develops the standards that apply to all food products produced or imported for sale in Australia and New Zealand.

That is the point that I am getting at. Anybody who wants to sell food products has to comply with a standard. There is probably a great deal of validity in what they say, but the other side of the argument is that all dairy farmers, if they want to produce milk for sale, have to ensure that that milk is pasteurised.

Let me refer to what the honourable member for Warrego moved tonight. It is important to note that there were no other members of the National Party or the Liberal Party in this chamber when the honourable member moved it. I call this a two bob amendment. It is an amendment that can support raw milk advocates, yet they can hope it will not upset the dairy industry. Members opposite want to show the people who support raw milk that they have moved this amendment and they hope that it will not upset the dairy industry. Well, have I got news for them! It is also a two bob amendment because it is not worth two bob.

The amendments ask for the primary producer to be exempt if the producer complies with the scientific standards for the removal set by Food Standards Australia New Zealand, or FSANZ. There are no scientific FSANZ standards for the removal of unpasteurised milk from a farm. There are absolutely none. The opposition member's amendment is worth less than two bob. It is unworkable. It is

meaningless and it is technically flawed. The member for Hinchinbrook correctly stated our obligation to implement the national food standards. He was sensible. He knows what he is talking about. An intergovernmental agreement signed by COAG in November 2000 confirmed that states' laws should be consistent with national standards developed by FSANZ. I can assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that Queensland is totally committed to upholding this agreement on food safety and is working with other jurisdictions to ensure national consistency for primary produce standards.

The member for Lockyer referred to the milk processors and implied that they were driving these amendments to close the loopholes for unpasteurised milk. He implied that the dairy farmers were not being heard. Let me read to members a letter from Mr Wes Judd, the president of the Queensland Dairyfarmers Organisation. I will also table that letter and seek that that letter be incorporated in *Hansard*. Madam Deputy Speaker, I will read the letter first so you know what I am talking about. Then you can make up your mind as to whether I will be allowed to incorporate it in *Hansard*. I think that is the way to go. It is dated October 27, 2003. It is not too long ago, is it? I do not have to incorporate it, do I? I will read it. Do not bother incorporating it, thank you. It states—

Re: Pasteurisation.

Dear Minister

**Mr Hobbs:** This is a two bob insertion.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Not bad, Howard. It says—

We write to present our support on behalf of industry of the proposed changes to the Queensland legislation that will prohibit the sale of raw milk for human consumption.

Dairy farmers across Queensland are continually meeting strict food safety requirements to ensure that the consuming public can freely access high quality, safe and nutritional dairy products. The industry in Queensland and Nationally has discussed pasteurisation on many occasions and has agreed it is an essential and accepted means of ensuring safety of dairy products as established in the FSANZ standards.

It is very important to note that these standards are based on science and thus should never become a political issue.

We therefore support the action of the Queensland government and Safe Food Queensland to rectify the legislation.

Yours sincerely,

Wesley J. Judd,

President

Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation Ltd.

I table the letter.

**Ms Lee Long:** There are plenty of other letters that deal with that.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is the Dairy Organisation of Queensland.

**Mr Hobbs** interjected.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Is the member criticising Wes Judd? My word, you are. He is criticising Wes Judd.

**Mr Hobbs:** They have a pecuniary interest in that.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Does the member know what their pecuniary interest is? To ensure that their industry does not go down the chute in case there is an outbreak of disease through the sale of unpasteurised milk. That is what it is all about. The member is criticising Wes Judd. He is criticising the Queensland Dairy Organisation. Where is this great association between dairy farmers and the National Party? Out the door! Out the door!

**Mr Hobbs:** It is very strong.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Out the door!

I hope no honourable member is going to claim Mr Judd is ignorant, irresponsible, careless or reckless in his consideration of this matter. The National Party and other members should consider what dairy farmers are saying. It is not the honourable members' livelihoods and their reputation that would be severely damaged by a widespread outbreak of disease linked with the consumption of milk. During the debate some members opposite have compared the situation of unpasteurised milk and alcohol consumption. Obviously there is a valid link—that is, the consumption of both are regulated. That is the link. They are both regulated. For alcohol consumption there are regulations about its consumption, such as those people consuming alcohol and being in charge of a motor vehicle or alcohol not being served to patrons who are clearly intoxicated.

Some honourable members have spoken about what happens overseas. I find it amazing that those members who have the Queensland flag on their tables and who talk about Australia for Australians would want us to slavishly copy what they claim the Americans and British do. Let me assure honourable members opposite that we are not the 51st state of the United States. We have an Australian food standard. We have decided what the food standards should be for our citizens. The International Dairy Foods Association, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and the US Food

and Drug Administration do not recommend that anyone consume unpasteurised milk. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention credits raw milk for the majority of US campylobacter outbreaks. About 10,000 become infected with the bacteria annually. Let me make it clear what pasteurisation does and why it is important. Pasteurisation is currently the only practical commercial measure which, if properly applied to all milk, will destroy any harmful micro-organisms in the product.

In conclusion, let me go through a table of outbreaks linked to the consumption of unpasteurised milk. In Queensland there were eight cases of cryptosporidium infection in 2001 amongst children on the Sunshine Coast. Three cases required hospitalisation. The outbreak was linked to the consumption of commercially obtained unpasteurised cows milk. Cryptosporidium was detected in milk samples. In the rest of Australia there were seven outbreaks. In 1997 there was one outbreak resulting in 27 cases. In 1999 there was one outbreak resulting in 12 cases. In 2000 there were two outbreaks resulting in a total of 33 cases. In 2001 there were two outbreaks resulting in eight cases and three hospitalisations on the Sunshine Coast. That is Queensland.

What about overseas? Those opposite all love the Americans. They love the British. Let us talk about what happens over there. There have been numerous reports in the literature of outbreaks of salmonella and more commonly the other infections associated with the consumption of unpasteurised milk. There have also been outbreaks caused by listeria and E. coli O157. Consumption of raw milk is a well-known risk factor for developing gastrointestinal infections caused by bacterial infections such as salmonella and so on and parasitic pathogens.

In the UK in 1983-84 there were 27 outbreaks of disease associated with the consumption of raw milk. From 1992 to 1994 there were three outbreaks linked with the consumption of raw milk—that is, 72, 22 and 23 cases reported respectively. In 1996 there was an E. coli O157 outbreak. Nine cases resulted from drinking raw cows milk. In the USA from 1981 to 1990 there were 20 outbreaks associated with drinking raw milk. The attack rate was 45 per cent. Some 458 of the 1,013 persons who drank that milk were infected. In 1983 there were six cases. In 1992-93 there were 16 cases. In 1997 there were 54 cases. In 2001 there were three cases. In 2003 there were 13 cases. The figures speak for themselves.

I can sympathise with those people out there in the community who are arguing for this. I can certainly sympathise, but the facts speak for themselves. The facts speak for themselves. The member for Gladstone, the member for Nanango and the member for Warrego all voted for this legislation in the year 2000. Now because there is an election around the corner, they have decided to change their minds. I rest my case.