



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 11 September 2003

PASTORAL WORKERS' ACCOMMODATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 1 April (see p. 1032)

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (4.00 p.m.): I am pleased to rise to speak to the Pastoral Workers' Accommodation Amendment bill. A review was undertaken to examine the effective operation of the act in contemporary times. The review was also initiated in view of the pending automatic expiration of the Pastoral Workers' Accommodation Regulation 1989. Under the Statutory Instruments Act 1992, this regulation is scheduled for expiry. The expiry has been extended on the basis that the act was subject to review. The next expiry date is 31 August 2003. We are 11 days past that date. I do not know what that really means.

Mr Nuttall interjected.

Mr HOBBS: The minister says not to worry about it. It might be interesting if we have a gap as a result, but maybe we will talk about that at the committee stage. There are a number of changes introduced under this bill. The meaning of 'accommodation' for the purpose of the act is extended to include transportable accommodation. In the shearing industry the cost of maintenance of buildings is getting difficult. A lot of shearers' quarters are getting very old and there is not the finance in the industry to upgrade or renew them.

The other day I was in Dubbo and I saw an innovative portable shearing shed and accommodation. Basically, it is all transported on the back of a truck. It folds out and everything is there. Accommodation can be in the form of caravans and portable donger-type buildings. That is probably the way things will go in due course. They will be able to pull up stumps and shift from place to place. It will certainly be a saving. I understand that using the shearing shed works out at roughly the same cost as it does to shear sheep in the normal operation. So that is one thing that will probably be around in the future.

The meaning of 'worker' in the act is extended to ensure that the minimum standards of accommodation are provided for all workers who perform pastoral work, including persons who perform work under a contract of service or a contract for service. Currently, the definition is limited to 'contract of service'. There has been some debate about that. I do not know whether that is entirely necessary, but anyway, it is there. I think this government has been a little bit hard in relation to contract work. In the shearing industry trouble shooters have provided a valuable service. They have changed the industry quite dramatically. They have brought some welcome changes to the industry. As in any industry, there is a lot of resistance to any changes.

I know that Labor governments—the Goss government in particular—have fought this really hard. In fact, I think one of the first pieces of legislation introduced by the Beattie government was one designed to try to knock out a fellow called Barry Hammond, who was a shearing contractor based in Charleville. He went to jail to stand up for his rights rather than be dictated to and stop doing what he was doing. He was providing a service on the basis of contract work, and it worked out very well.

Mr Lawlor: It worked out very well for him.

Mr HOBBS: Are you saying that he should not be doing that?

Mr Lawlor: It worked out well for him. What about his employees?

Mr HOBBS: It worked out well for the employees, too.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Poole): Order! The member will direct his comments through the chair.

Mr HOBBS: In fact, the employees were far better off. That was the interesting thing. The employees were better off. I went to listen to the court case at the time, and it was very interesting. The union movement was trying to push that the workers were worse off. In fact, the workers were better off under his system. They were paid per head and they were as happy as Larry. They were completely happy with it. It is a bit like when the wide combs came in. For some unknown reason, the unions were against it. It was easier, it was faster and the shearers earned more money, but—

Mr Purcell: I do not know about it being easy. If you pushed those big wide combs you would know they were not easy, my boy.

Mr HOBBS: I know the member for Bulimba would not have pushed too many hand pieces through too many sheep, that is for sure.

Mr Purcell: I have done my share with wide combs, I can tell you.

Mr HOBBS: Have you shorn a few?

Mr Purcell: Oh, yeah.

Mr HOBBS: Good on you.

Mr Purcell interjected.

Mr HOBBS: This is very interesting.

Mr Purcell interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bulimba is on the speaking list. He can get it out of his system then.

Mr Mickel interjected.

Mr HOBBS: He has to make sure that he remembers to put the bogghi down, too, instead of having it bouncing around.

Mr Purcell interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! You will not say anything.

Mr Purcell: No, I withdraw that.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I do not think you need it.

Mr HOBBS: The act is amended to provide that the amount deducted from a worker's wages for damage to accommodation caused by the worker or workers has increased from \$40 to \$100. This amount has remained unchanged for some time.

It is interesting to note that the Department of Industrial Relations is requesting occupiers of pastoral properties to give notice of any crutching operations. This is in addition to the current requirement to give notice when shearing is under way. That is fair enough, I guess. Nobody does it now, anyway. It is just the way it is. It is like being a bit late with legislation. I suppose there is nobody around these days, anyway. It is very hard for those guys to travel around. The area is too big. I do not think it is necessary, quite frankly.

New provisions will be added requiring occupiers to keep unused buildings securely closed and ensure that buildings are kept free of vermin. Also, areas surrounding buildings are to be kept free of long grass to ensure safe access to reduce fire hazards. That is reasonable enough. A lot of maintenance has to be done. It is very hard sometimes. There have not been the funds for a number of years now in the shearing industry to employ staff, although it has improved somewhat in the last couple of years. It is very difficult. In a perfect world it is good to have ongoing maintenance to ensure that buildings are looked after.

The bill will clarify that any person may commence proceedings for an offence under the act which is in line with current legislative principles. Is this in relation to any offence? I would have thought it would have been or should have been somebody within the industry. I do not think it is right that somebody who is driving along the road and who has no interest in the matter can play a part in any offence procedure. This can happen in relation to environmental matters, too. That is entirely different, I think, but that is the way it reads. Somebody from Adelaide can complain about the Murray-Darling Basin in Queensland, for instance, and I do not think that is reasonable. We have to have somebody who is involved in the industry, otherwise we will get vexatious claims. That needs to be considered. Overall, we do not see a great number of problems with this legislation, and I commend the bill to the House.