



Speech by

Pat Purcell

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

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PLANT PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (5.25 p.m.): The Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2004 relates to a matter that certainly created interest for Queenslanders and made the media Australia wide, as it should. It was a real crisis. The amendments contained in this bill are very urgent and essential. It is great to see members from all sides of the House supporting this bill.

The amendments are designed to correct the deficiencies in the Plant Protection Act 1989 that were identified during the emergency response to the citrus canker pest incursion. The citrus canker disease outbreak near Emerald was very serious and needed a serious response and the Department of Primary Industries needed to identify and eradicate the disease. As other speakers have said, this was an enormous task for the department and some 300 people from the Department of Primary Industries were involved in that operation.

Foremost, we need to ensure that we prevent the spread of this disease throughout the state. It would be a catastrophe if that occurred. I have heard members speak about the importance of the fruit-growing industries in their electorates—around the Stanthorpe area—and what an outbreak of this disease would do to those industries. Such an outbreak would affect not only the Queensland citrus industry but also the Australian citrus industry.

This legislation goes a long way towards achieving the goal of prevention, control and eradication. This government needs to be able to effectively respond to such outbreaks. The legislation will ensure that there is no legal doubt of what can and cannot be done under the existing legislation as confusion creates time delays and time delays in these instances are devastating and also cost producers enormous amounts of money if their product cannot be brought onto the market or is excluded from markets in other states or even overseas.

Recently, the Department of Primary Industries' powers to eradicate diseases were challenged in the Supreme Court. Even though the government's actions were upheld, we have learned a valuable lesson from the process. If we are to be responsible for tackling devastating exotic diseases such as citrus canker, we need the back-up of strong legislation to be able to apply appropriate eradication measures. People talk about other diseases that can come into the industry. The ability to eradicate those diseases will also be strengthened by this bill.

This bill will provide certainty. It will remove the ability of some owners of diseased properties to seek injunctions to prevent eradication; provide greater disease surveillance powers for inspectors, which in this case could be over a long period; allow inspectors to access records to trace movements of potential diseased plant matter; increase penalties for breaches of the act, including personal liability for company directors; and clarify the right of the state to carry out the necessary treatment or destruction within a pest quarantine area.

So members can see that we are addressing and enforcing the prevention, control and eradication of disease. The penalties need to be increased as they do not reflect the seriousness of the breaches of the law that some unscrupulous people ignore.