



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND FISHERIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (4.12 p.m.): The Primary Industries and Fisheries Legislation Amendment Bill 2004 proposes to repeal the Sawmills Licensing Act 1936 and make amendments to a number of acts in the Primary Industries and Fisheries portfolio. These are the Exotic Diseases in Animals Act 1981, the Fisheries Act 1994, the Food Production (Safety) Act 2001, the Grain Industry (Restructuring) Act 1991 and the Stock Act 1915. The bill proposes to amend both the Stock Act 1915 and the Exotic Diseases in Animals Act to simplify the appeals process under each act and stresses that these amendments will not have retrospective functions. The proposed amendments will involve providing for another level of appeal beyond the Magistrates Court in the case of the Stock Act and the District Court in the case of the Exotic Diseases in Animals Act.

When speaking of exotic diseases, I stress that prevention is better than cure. The stock inspector based at Alpha has preventive authority, and the minister would have to agree that preventing an outbreak of animal and other diseases has great importance. Prevention is the best form of eradication and the tick line that extends through the southern and north-western part of my electorate is an effective and efficient method to prevent the spread of cattle tick and other diseases.

However, it is of great concern to the primary producers of the area that the position of stock inspector is being replaced by third party providers who do not have the power to deter truckloads of cattle from bypassing the dip, nor are they qualified to monitor and report diseases and stock movement.

The prevention of the spread of cattle tick and diseases in western Queensland has an extremely high priority. The minister himself admits that the destruction of the cattle industry during a major disease episode would cost the state millions of dollars. The industry contributes more than \$3 billion a year to the state's economy and yet, due to a funding shortfall, the inspector's position at Alpha, which is responsible for dipping on average 25,000 head of cattle per year plus spraying 900 horses a year, is not being filled. This is an insult when one considers that a multi-million dollar industry is being placed in jeopardy because the government is too lousy to provide a stock inspector. Through its neglect, the government is not filling the position of stock inspector and is providing an avenue for an entire industry to be placed in serious jeopardy. There is no doubt who will be responsible for that. This government says that it is committed to biosecurity and the prevention of introduced diseases and pests in Queensland and Australian industries. Therefore, a stock inspector at Alpha must be a government priority.

With reference to the impending implementation of the National Livestock Identification Scheme, once again we see the government disregarding the needs of the billion-dollar cattle and sheep industries. The Beattie government needs to match the \$20 million federal coalition funding pledge to assist the cattle and sheep industries to adopt a National Livestock Identification Scheme. Queensland is by far the biggest beef state in Australia. Despite having half the national beef herd, the government has consistently refused to provide financial help to producers to implement the new electronic tagging system that will become law in Queensland next year. There is not a cent for the producers who will have to comply with the new laws. They are the ones who will have to buy the electronic tags and readers. By committing \$20 million, the

federal government has thrown down the gauntlet to the Beattie government to provide some real financial support to ensure producers alone are not left to carry the entire burden of introducing this new system.

The only state government money allocated to assist the cattle industry was \$690,000 to support infrastructure within the industry. However, this will do little to assist Queensland saleyards and abattoirs prepare for the National Livestock Identification Scheme, NLIS. The Roma saleyards alone will have to spend more than \$250,000 to prepare for NLIS, so that state support will not go far to assist the dozens of saleyards throughout the state, to say nothing of the huge number of abattoirs that will also need to get ready for NLIS.

Australia's national beef herd stands at 24 million head. Queensland has about half the national herd. New South Wales has half Queensland's herd and Victoria has half New South Wales's herd. The Bracks government in Victoria has committed \$15 million over five years to implement NLIS in Victoria and the New South Wales government's support package is valued at \$6.4 million with \$1 million set aside to specifically assist livestock producers buy electronic tags. Can the state afford to ignore the plight of this \$3 billion industry and ignore the fact that, while other states are putting their hands into the public coffers to assist primary producers, it continues to promise loose change only? People will be directly and financially seriously disadvantaged by this scheme.

In relation to green zones, one thing that needs to be questioned is the severe penalties that have been imposed upon fishermen. We are looking at severe fines of up to \$220,000 for individuals and \$1.1 million for corporations. My electorate of Charters Towers includes people from places like Moranbah and Hughenden who cannot grasp the concept of or understand the invisible zones. When comparing these fines to much more lenient ones for drug trafficking, I cannot believe that catching a fish is such a serious crime. Both state and federal governments need to look at that issue. Overall, I commend the bill to the House.