



Speech by

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PRIMARY INDUSTRIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (11.43 am): Today we are debating the Primary Industries Legislation Amendment Bill 2006 which takes in eight separate acts. The bill incorporates the Agricultural Standards Act 1994, the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001, the Brands Act 1915, the Drugs Misuse Act 1986, the Exotic Diseases in Animals Act 1981, the Grain Research Foundation Act 1976, the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936 and the Grain Industry (Restructuring) Act 1991. We are supporting this bill today. It is an omnibus bill that addresses a number of changes in the legislative framework of these acts. We support the many mechanical and technical changes that are involved. At the outset, I want to thank the staff of the department of primary industries who showed us courtesies during our detailed briefing with regard to all of the different parts of this bill and thank the minister for arranging that briefing.

Whilst we are discussing an omnibus bill and many technical and mechanical changes, there are a number of major issues affecting primary industries at the moment and I will touch on those as we go through. I want to start by mentioning the all-pervading drought that is affecting the state at the moment and the dreadful effect that that has had. I have already called for the department of primary industries and the minister to have a very strong and substantial look at the drought relief that is provided in Queensland. For many years that assistance has been the same; it basically provides some assistance to primary producers to make application for the Commonwealth assistance—that is, exceptional circumstances. However, in recent years much of that application and assistance has had to be undertaken by organisations like AgForce and QFF because of the shortage of staff within the DPI as the cutbacks have continued and the DPI does not have the complete wherewithal of people to attend to that and the drought unit itself was dismantled. The direct assistance provided by the state through DRAS—the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme—is mainly involved with providing low-interest loans through QRAA. Of course if people are in a droughted situation, very often it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to take on more debt when they are simply drowning in debt and getting further and further into debt. It also provides for assistance in the cartage of fodder and assistance in the cartage of cattle to agistment—that is, assistance one way only.

Recently Victoria and New South Wales have both brought in innovative additional drought assistance schemes which have been tailor-made to the particular needs of the farmers in those states. In Victoria it particularly applies to the relief of fees on irrigators. In Queensland we see many irrigators who are paying fees and levies for fresh air, because there is no water and they have no water to draw upon. Nevertheless, they are paying these charges—the charges are at different levels—when they do not have any water. Fundamentally, that is wrong. People can understand some basic payment towards the maintenance of the facilities and so forth, but when there is no product—no water—and these people are paying for nothing, that is morally wrong. In a time of drought, that should be addressed, as it has been in Victoria.

Whilst it is perhaps more in the domain of DNR, it behoves our minister as the leader of primary industries to speak up on behalf of our primary industries producers both publicly and around the cabinet table to see if a new drought scheme can be brought in. New South Wales has addressed the issues of the disastrous flow-on effects of drought to contractors and small businesspeople. The other day I heard a

young man with two kids on talkback radio who had bought a semitrailer to cart grain. The work has just simply vanished. He has payments on that truck. He is paying his house off. He has to make payments on the truck. I think he had borrowed \$180,000 or something like that for the truck.

Mr Wallace interjected.

Mr HORAN: I take that interjection. The reason he can buy the truck is that he is not paying the 22 per cent interest rates that were there when Labor was in power. Now that the member opposite is the newly made minister for DNR, he might like to consider this: when those interest rates of 18 per cent or 19 per cent were in place, there was another two per cent added to that on rural lands because of the risk involved. People were paying 21 per cent and 22 per cent interest. Business was paying that as well. Just remember that and just think what it was like to try to pay interest rates at that amount—in the double figures and more than 20 per cent. If they missed one payment they were on the slippery slope to oblivion. If the member opposite is now the new minister for DNR, he would do well to remember that interest rates were once 20 per cent and the crippling effect that that had under a Labor government. We have had sustained lower interest rates well under 10 per cent under the Howard government—down as low as six per cent, seven per cent and eight per cent in recent times. That has been a driving force in having a sound economy.

Those needs in a time of drought should be considered in a new package. Small-business operators in country areas should receive relief on payroll tax and other people involved in primary industries should receive relief on the fees, levies and taxes that are charged. Also, in cases of extreme hardship the New South Wales government is assisting people in the payment of bills, particularly bills relating to utilities that provide the necessities of life, such as electricity. I wanted to open my remarks today when speaking to this Primary Industries Legislation Amendment Bill by talking about that issue. It is a humanitarian need, a social need and an economic need.

Another issue that needs leadership from the department of primary industries and the minister is what the farmers are being paid for their product. Intensive industries such as dairies, piggeries, poultry farms and feedlots are experiencing enormous difficulty in being able to make ends meet. The price of their key commodity—grain—has gone up from about \$180 a tonne to \$350 a tonne, and that is if they can get it. Most of the feedlots in Queensland have supply contracts to next May, but then they end. From there on they do not have any supply, unless there is good rain throughout Queensland or somewhere else in Australia this season to produce some more grain. Summer crops are not going to be harvested until next May, April or June at the earliest. So it will be touch and go as to whether there is enough feed. No feed can be imported from Western Australia and South Australia, as occurred in previous droughts, because the drought has spread right across Australia.

The drought has also hit businesses. Businesses in Toowoomba that make grain-drying equipment have lost major contracts in the Atherton Tableland because of the cyclone. The corn could no longer be dried, because it was flattened. Those businesses have nowhere else to look for new business, because the grain crops throughout the rest of Australia have just not come through this winter. These are the sorts of things that are happening to intensive industries.

When we were in government from 1996 to 1998, the dairy industry was regulated and we were able to bring in a modest increase in the price per litre of milk to cover the feeding that had to be undertaken by dairy farmers during a drought. But under deregulation there are simply dairy contracts with the major retail chains or milk sales to strip shopping centres. How do the dairy farmers get a better price for their milk to help offset the major cost of not only grain but also fodder in this time of drought? Some of the dairy paddocks on the downs are just brown dirt. The dairy farmers are handfeeding their stock at a massive cost.

If we want to maintain the source of the milk supply in Queensland, I think the minister and the department should show leadership and bring the retailers, the processors, the dairy organisation, or the other industry organisations around the table and ask, 'What can be done to ensure that the price the farmer receives is reasonable so that they can keep their heads above water and that any price increase that is received flows through to those who are drought affected, that is, the primary producer, not the processor?' I will continue to push for that to happen. I know it is difficult to do that in a commercial world, but if we want to look after our own primary producers and if the commercial world wants the clean, fresh, high-quality produce that is on the tables of Queensland families continued to be produced in Queensland rather than overseas—which involves increased cartage costs and how cleanly the product is produced is unknown—or interstate then the commercial world will have to consider ways of helping these people through this very difficult time.

During an adjournment debate speech the member for Hinchinbrook raised a number of problems occurring with sugar harvesting in the CSR mill areas and the number of harvesting days and hours that have been lost owing to breakdowns. That has had a big economic impact upon areas of Queensland. The member for Hinchinbrook referred to the Herbert area. That is another example where leadership can be provided by the department to ensure that efficient harvesting procedures are in place. The department should meet with commercial operators to ensure that those operators have all the good gear and

equipment in place so that the harvesting takes place properly, that the window of opportunity for achieving a good c.c.s is met and that everyone gets a fair go.

This bill makes amendments to eight acts, the first of which is the Agricultural Standards Act 1994, which provides for the making of agricultural standards and for other agricultural matters. This bill changes the power to seize animals, plants or other things from properties if there is evidence that an offence has been committed against the act or if there is a warrant to seize evidence. We on this side of the House agree with this amendment. We acknowledge that it is a relatively minor issue in comparison to the huge biosecurity issues that face agriculture in Queensland. Nevertheless, these changes are necessary and we will look at them in more detail in the consideration in detail stage.

During the last election campaign, as part of the coalition's policies, I announced the implementation of a special biosecurity unit within the department of primary industries and the provision of more stock inspectors. We were going to provide 50 more stock inspectors and extension officers. Whether they are called stock inspectors or biosecurity officers—I was criticised for calling them stock inspectors and not the new, flashier term of biosecurity officers—to people in rural Queensland, stock inspectors mean people who are the eyes and ears of their district. Those people provide advice so that primary producers can plan properly and have systems in place so that there are no problems but, if there are problems, then there are people to whom rural producers can go to have them dealt with straightaway.

We also need more vets involved in biosecurity in the department of primary industries. Whereas the New South Wales government has the same number or more vets than it had at the beginning of the 1990s, in Queensland the number of veterinary surgeons within the department of primary industries has declined by 30 per cent. I think that really points the finger at the Labor government and the way in which it has not understood the real purpose and reason for the department of primary industries and the key people in the key professions that are needed within a department of primary industries. When it comes to biosecurity, veterinary surgeons and stock inspectors are essential. I know that the vets have real issues with the department when it comes to pay rates. They have been negotiating for some two or three years to try to get some parity with vets who work interstate. There is no point in saying, 'Those vets live in Sydney where it costs more to get a house.' Most vets who are employed in country New South Wales face a similar rate in the cost of living as do those who live in country Queensland.

If we do not have vets and other trained professionals to lead biosecurity and a problem arises, we will not have the professionally trained staff that we need. North Queensland and the Northern Territory will have the biggest problems if there is an incursion of an exotic disease. Those areas need a good number of veterinary surgeons, yet, as I said, since 1991 our vet numbers have declined by 30 per cent.

I wish to point out a couple of issues on biosecurity that the Agricultural Standards Act looks at. Under Labor, the Rockhampton Veterinary Laboratory was closed. The laboratory was a critically important link in the biosecurity chain of Queensland. As you come from central Queensland, Mr Deputy Speaker, you would be well aware of the strength of the cattle industry. Central Queensland is the cattle capital of Australia. In the early 1990s, the laboratory employed three veterinarians and 12 technicians and ancillary staff. It established an excellent record for disease diagnosis. It was closed by attrition and subterfuge, despite assurances made in 2001 by both the Premier and the department of primary industries minister of the day that the facility would not be closed. Rockhampton sits at the very heart of the largest beef producing region in Australia. The Rockhampton Veterinary Laboratory, which was established by the coalition government, was in a key position to protect this extremely valuable industry against endemic, exotic and newly emerging industries.

Secondly, the Queensland government maintains two veterinarian diagnostic laboratories in south-eastern Queensland. They employ a total of 11 experienced and semi-experienced veterinarian diagnostic pathologists. In spite of the fact that Queensland is one of the largest states in the world with a diverse range of livestock raising enterprises and systems, there are now no experienced veterinary pathologists employed north of Brisbane.

The Oonoomba Veterinary Laboratory in Townsville once employed at least two highly experienced land animal pathologists. It no longer has any experienced pathologists servicing the production animal industries of north Queensland. It is disgraceful that that has happened to the important rural areas of central and north Queensland under the Labor government. It is an almost criminal run-down in biosecurity in central and north Queensland, at a time when diseases such as avian influenza, Hendra virus infection, the bat lyssavirus infection and the potential bioterrorism disease of anthrax are constantly being talked about in the popular press.

I will speak a little about the run-down in biosecurity in Queensland under Labor. As I said earlier, there has been a decline of about 30 per cent in the total number of government vets employed in Queensland since 1991. In 1991, the Queensland department of primary industries employed 91 vets. In 2004, that number had fallen to 64. The reference for that statistic is the Veterinarian Surgeons Register of 1991 and 2004, and the QDPI staff lists. While the Queensland government has allowed this to occur, since 1981 the New South Wales government has maintained its vet numbers at a substantially higher

level. New South Wales has a system where the Rural Lands Protection Board does part of the work and the agricultural department does part of the work. In 1981, those two organisations employed 130 veterinarians. In 2002, the number of vets employed was 116. Thus, the number of government veterinarians within the New South Wales agricultural system has remained steady over the past 20 years.

In spite of the insistence of the Queensland government, particularly through QDPI, that this decline has been due to the rundown in the brucellosis and tuberculosis eradication scheme, this is not the case. Some of the most intellectually gifted and capable of our veterinarians have gone of their own volition to higher paying, more stimulating positions within the Commonwealth public service and academic institutions both in Australia and overseas. A number of Queensland centres that employed veterinarians in 1991 no longer have vets or, as in the case of Rockhampton, the number of field veterinarians has been halved.

The Rockhampton veterinarian laboratory has played a critical and highly important role in animal health and biosecurity in central Queensland. It was involved in the diagnosis of anthrax, a disease never previously seen in central Queensland. The centre has been closed in spite of assurances by the then minister, Mr Palaszczuk, and Premier Beattie, quoted in the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*, that this would not happen.

The Rockhampton laboratory, which was closed by the Labor government, once employed three experienced veterinarians and about 12 experienced technicians and ancillary staff. The record of excellence of this laboratory is second to none. In 1992 the laboratory diagnosed anthrax, which had never been seen previously in central Queensland. That is a well-documented example of the excellence of the laboratory. Some argue that if there is to be only one laboratory in Queensland, it should be located in central Queensland, which is the heart of the greatest cattle producing state in Australia. However, because of the size of the state and the different types of industries that we have, it is important that those laboratories be spread strategically around the state. For example the Darling Downs has intensive industries such as piggeries, the thoroughbred industry and the feedlotting industry. North Queensland has the cattle industry, and cane and horticultural industries.

North Queensland is in a critical position. It is at the interface between what might be described as clean Australia and other areas of south-east Asia that have substantial disease. We need to be serviced by a veterinary laboratory that has a number of experienced pathologists on staff and that gives time to research, thus providing the barrier that we need. Sometimes it is said that if bioterrorists had their wits about them and they wanted to introduce a destructive disease into Australia, they would target the sparsely populated north of our nation, yet we have no effective laboratory presence north of Brisbane. That illustrates how serious the situation is.

This is a wake-up call to the Beattie Labor government. It must take a strong look at the department of primary industries and the need to employ additional stock inspectors and veterinarian officers. It must provide veterinary officers with a pay scale that is equivalent to what they could get interstate or elsewhere. The government must look at truly decentralising the state. For its size, Queensland is the most decentralised state in the world. The government must ensure that we have a professional biosecurity presence spread not only throughout southern Queensland but also central and north Queensland.

Recently in the Peachester area, a case of Hendra virus arose. As a result, the minister ordered an independent review, which stated that the response by the officers of the department of primary industries was substantially in line with their requirements. However, I have an issue with what happened in the 10 days leading up to that particular response. I refer to the support provided to young veterinarians working in the field, who have to make critical and professional diagnoses of important diseases. They need support and the owners of the affected animals need help, advice and support.

People get very attached to their horses. It is extremely distressing to watch a horse die from a disease like Hendra virus. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to put the best biosecurity practices into place. The officer has to try to keep people away from a horse that they are emotionally attached to. There can be serious problems with the horse thrashing around and so on.

As a result of the review that the minister ordered, a number of recommendations were made. I could read them out, but basically they refer to communications, guidelines, web sites and response. We can have all the practice events in the world. Indeed, a few months back in Toowoomba, a practice event was held based on the scenario of a possible disease outbreak and everyone got quite alarmed. The theoretical event was a particular disease outbreak in Millmerran, and they realised that they no longer have a DPI stock inspector in Millmerran which put a spanner in the works. It was an expensive and comprehensive role play or practice of a major event.

Hendra virus can be alarming. It is an exotic and dreadful disease because it comes from bats, similar to lyssavirus. In layman's terms, it could be described as a meltdown of the brain. During the 1990s, there were some human deaths as well as horse deaths from this virus.

This young vet at Peachester made a brilliant diagnosis and she deserved support, advice and assistance from day one not only for what she was doing but in helping the family who owned the horse. A number of arrangements are supposed to be put in place in relation to a suspected case of Hendra virus. Some of the recommendations were that the web site be updated and that the guidelines be the one critical thing that everybody goes by so that certain procedures are put in place in relation to a suspected case of Hendra virus.

Just the other day there was another suspected case at another veterinary practice in the same area. Again, it was in an area where there are fruit bats, which are the potential carriers of lyssavirus. They carry it in their urine and other discharge. That puts animals, particularly horses, in that area at risk—for example, they may be standing underneath a tree that is home to a colony of bats and so forth. In this instance, again another young vet had a horse with a suspected case of Hendra virus. The vet rang the DPI, and the DPI officer said that they did not think it was the virus. That was on a Tuesday. The horse died on the Wednesday, and the family who were emotionally involved were told by the young vet to keep away from the horse. But you can understand how people feel about horses they are very strongly attached to. It was on the Wednesday that the horse died—I think it was late in the day.

Listed on the web site are three numbers that could be rung to notify the authorities of a suspected case of Hendra virus. It is important that these numbers work. If someone is going to ring about a case of avian influenza, Hendra virus or mad cow or something like that, they need to get an instant response, particularly when the people are extremely concerned—even if the response is a reassuring one where they say that they will be out there first thing or they will do this, that or the other. Of the three numbers that were listed, two of the numbers went straight to message bank—and I acknowledge that when the vet rang them it was after 9 pm. On ringing the third number, which is called a LINX system, it took some 10½ minutes to get through. And then it was only after the vet used pretty strong words to get some action that they eventually got some action. But they had to ring the person who did the independent review, Dr Nigel Perkins, to get some action. They rang him, then the LINX person rang back and then they got communication happening and they said that they would be out the next day. I am not sure what time they got out there the next day, but it was certainly after 10.30. That meant that the horse had been dead for the best part of three parts of a day.

Then there are all the biosecurity issues—what materials you wear when you are doing the autopsy, where the horse is buried, the EPA is supposed to be consulted. These were all the lessons that were learnt from the last event. As I understand it, these things did not happen. It is not good when the government has spent taxpayers' money having an independent review and then things work less than perfectly in the very next instance. I hope that by raising this issue we can get this sort of thing fixed up. When it comes to exotic diseases, responses have to be immediate. Where there are phone numbers listed—in this case, there were three different numbers—there has to be someone who answers or someone on call.

Vets have to be given the correct advice about what particular tissue has to be taken for the autopsy. In a suspected case of Hendra virus, it is very important that lung tissue and blood are taken, for example. The advice has to be correct as to what is to be taken. Whilst we are looking at some technical issues in the legislation to do with agricultural standards, biosecurity and so on, they have to work on the ground. It is one thing to dot the i's and cross the t's in legislation, but that head of power has to flow through the management structures, and the discipline and direction that is provided by the department so that we can be proud of the response that occurs and the team that responds can be proud of the professional way in which they acted. We have to get these things 100 per cent right because exotic disease is such a big issue for our primary industries in Queensland.

The next amendments in the bill are to the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001. This act, as it states, looks after the welfare of animals. I think every one of us in this House abhors cruelty to animals, and we support industry, primary industry and the department developing guidelines for the responsible care and use of animals, and protecting them from cruelty. I want to refer in particular to a decision of ARMCANZ which was made in August 2000 regarding the layer hen housing legislation. This was done to ensure that layer hens have a more comfortable life—that the space of the pens is larger, that the drinking nibbles are sufficient and that, at a certain height, the cages are front-opening cages and a number of other things.

To its credit, Queensland has abided by the ARMCANZ decision of August 2000. A space of eight years was given for the decision of ARMCANZ to be complied with, rightly to allow people the time to get capital together—it is extremely costly to replace sheds and layouts. I know that organisations and industry in Queensland have spent \$80 million to \$100 million making these changes. That capital cost has to be added to the cost of producing the eggs, but Queensland has complied. I think the ACT and Tasmania are the only other states that have complied. Victoria has not done it yet, and South Australia will probably walk hand in hand with Victoria. New South Wales is simply talking about it.

The disadvantage that Queensland egg producers will have is that, because they have complied with this decision of ARMCANZ—because they have spent tens of millions of dollars in improving the

capital structure and the welfare of the hens—they are going to be extremely disadvantaged when competing with egg producers from other states that have not complied. As I said, I give credit to Queensland because Queensland has complied. I think that is something that has been well done by the minister's predecessors. The important thing is for Queensland, as one of the states that has complied, and Peter McGauran, the federal minister, to ensure that the other recalcitrant states do the right thing and comply with the decision that was taken by ARMCANZ.

Apart from the economic consequences, the other consequence is that the states, the federal government and animal welfare organisations all agreed to this ARMCANZ decision. If the other states do not live up to their responsibilities and to what was agreed, then this industry could once again face attacks from animal welfare organisations because it has not complied with a decision that everybody agreed with. As I said, Queensland has done the right thing. I would like to see, for the reasons I have outlined, more pressure applied to the federal minister and to the other states to fix this anomaly.

The next amendments dealt with in the bill relate to the Brands Act. Whilst the amendments here are technical, they extend stock inspector status to all police officers rather than only to those police who have a direct involvement in rural industry or who have training in relevant fields.

This is something that I think we need to look at. Police officers are often used to doing a whole range of things because very often they are the only person there. I hope that this is not being brought in because the department is getting short of stock inspectors. We need to be sure that all police, if they are automatically a stock inspector, have the training and the expertise to undertake the duties that may be asked of them or, of necessity, forced upon them. Police in areas where they may have to do stock inspection duties must receive the correct training so they know and understand what they are doing. There is a duty of care on those police officers that they know how to handle stock because, if there is a young police officer from the city who does not know how to safely get into yards with large livestock, they may get injured. That is what I have some concern about.

I know the wide-ranging duties that police have. My father and grandfather were police officers. My father was in charge of the Inala Police Station, you might like to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, being the member for Inala.

Mr Hopper interjected.

Mr HORAN: My father loved his time looking after the Inala Police Station. I know the wide range of duties that police officers do. Some of the duties crop up at a moment's notice. There could be an injured animal or a truck that has fallen over and police are called in.

Whilst police have always been stock inspectors, they have been appointed stock inspectors in specific instances. Now we have a major change where all police will automatically be stock inspectors, I presume, from the moment that they are sworn in. I am concerned about the amount of training that police have received to be stock inspectors.

There are some minor changes to the Drugs Misuse Act 1986. That mainly involves forcing licensees and researchers to have photo identification. The Drugs Misuse Act sets out to consolidate and amend the law relating to the misuse of drugs and to make further provision for the prevention of the misuse of drugs.

A large amount of this legislation deals with the establishment of a hemp industry from the growing of industrial hemp. This legislation does not support or encourage the growing of this versatile product. It does not say anything about its benefit as a viable alternative to broadacre crops. It is really simply about some of the technical matters that relate to the growing of hemp.

When legislation was put in place to allow hemp to be grown, by the very nature of the crop it had to have significant guidelines and licences and so forth so that this crop could be grown for the purpose of industrial products and not for the growing of marijuana. It is a rotational crop that can have significant benefits over other rotational crops such as soybeans, maize or forage sorghum.

I have gone to Dalby to look at the growing of hemp and cannabis. It has a lot of potential, particularly in some of the broadacre, black soil plain areas. Whilst we have to maintain strict guidelines as to how hemp is grown, we need to encourage this crop. In some of the sugar areas of the state when, in recent years, sugar prices were not good and farmers were looking at possible alternatives, they looked at the possibility of using hemp as a rotational crop or for industrial products.

It would be well worth the department looking into the use of hemp or the seeds as a food product. I understand that it is a very rich source of vitamins and amino acids. When the Queensland industrial hemp farmers first met to form a farmers' group in 1998, there was a lot of government legislation, and laws had to be changed to allow for the growing of industrial hemp. As I understand it at the moment, hemp can be grown for industrial purposes but it cannot be grown as a food. In the crops that I have inspected, I have been told of the potential that hemp has as a food. Again, people have to be very careful as to how hemp is grown and the supervision that is required.

Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the minister, I think the problem that has come about in allowing it to be grown as a food has been that some of the other states, maybe New South Wales in particular, have not been keen because of the potential for misuse. That probably has to be the primary thing we look at. We do not want to see the farming of a product expanding and it getting misused. If there is a positive side to using hemp seed for food purposes, as it is used in other parts of the world, and if it can do good things for our primary industry, then we should look at it.

I would like to ask the minister to look at something that I have heard of, and that is the extremely high charges that are applied by the DPI for the testing of what is called the THC levels in trial blocks. It is \$650 per test, and many tests may be required for a block. The tests may not arrive back until after the hemp has been harvested, which of course would be useless. I understand that there is a company called Agri Fibre in the Bundaberg/Childers area. It has developed a test that costs approximately \$1. It seems a very, very significant difference. I think it would be well worthwhile looking at this test because cane farmers in that area are interested in growing hemp.

Industrially hemp can be used to make paper, textiles, geotextiles, structural reinforcement of building materials, fibreglass replacement products, light-weight sandwich boards, composite boards, absorbency products such as kitty litter, potting mix, nappies and fuel. But the hemp seed that I mentioned, whole or crushed for oil, is used in food products such as muesli bars, cakes, breads, biscuits, butter paste, non-dairy milk, tofu, cheese and ice cream. The seed is a superior cosmetic oil. Both the essential and cold-pressed oils are used in many cosmetics such as shampoos, soaps and moisturisers. The cold-pressed seed oil has nutritional qualities similar to evening primrose oil, cod liver oil, flaxseed oil and soybean supplement. It sounds like the answer to everything. It obviously has a lot of potential.

The Exotic Diseases in Animals Act 1981 is an extremely important piece of legislation. It is involved in the prevention of exotic disease in animals, the compensation of owners for loss or destruction of animals on property during outbreaks of exotic diseases, the establishment of an exotic diseases expenses and compensation fund, and for any other related purposes. One of the main changes to this legislation is removing the words 'fowl plague' because that is old terminology and is now replaced by more modern words such as avian flu.

I have talked about the Hendra virus, veterinary surgeons and biosecurity issues. They are the sorts of things that also come under this bill. I will not go over them again, but I think they are very important.

I also mention smut. It has been a real disaster for the Childers area. We have supported what the department of primary industries has been doing from the start but as time has gone by, there have been some concerns.

I give credit to the government for the \$16 million-odd that it has put into combating smut in that area. It was hoped originally that it would be in the order of about \$42 million. Under the planned emergency deed arrangement, which involves the Commonwealth government and every other single state government, along with the state government that is having the particular problem, if those parties can be convinced that the disease can be contained then they are to provide funds towards the containment.

In this case Queensland was not able to convince the other Labor states or the coalition federal government that that could be done. I know that there is a review of that decision underway and I hope that the work that has been undertaken can convince those other governments that containment can be successfully and practically undertaken.

In the meantime there is a big problem in the area. It has taken many months to get the management plans in place. The approach of the hot weather has created a better environment for the smut and more and more smut has been found in that particular area with the result that crops have had to be ploughed out. That has meant that people have lost first and second return crops. Sugar, being about a five year rotation, means that it can be extremely costly to plant a sugar crop. The \$200,000 a hectare being provided by the government has been well received and I give it credit for it.

Growers are facing some very serious problems. Not only have they had to plough out the crops and will go back to a large number of new crops, which will have some effect upon production volumes; they are having to source cane from north Queensland that is smut resistant or hopefully still smut resistant in the different climate of the Childers area. It may have been bred in the north. One problem that can sometimes arise is that the production of the smut resistant cane may not be as high in terms of volume or CCS as the cane that has been ploughed out.

They also have some real problems of volume through the mill. Fortunately the mill is a cooperative mill—a mill we all admire for its management, cooperative structure and success over many generations. One of the things that I have pushed for that will be a real boost to the area, and I believe is within the realms of what the government can achieve, is in relation to a block of forestry land which is called block 779. It is planned to grow trees on this block of land. Many places can be found to grow trees, but not many blocks of land of this size can be found that have a cane tram track through them, an irrigation channel on one side and an irrigation pipeline on the other side and are in the cooperative mill area. Everything is

logical and right about this block of ground being provided to the industry and fortunately in this case it is a cooperative mill so something can be done for the benefit of everybody in that mill.

I believe this is a very sensible solution. Trees can be grown elsewhere. This land is too valuable and well located, with its irrigation and cane tram tracks, to grow trees on. It should be growing cane. Still plant the trees, but plant them elsewhere. If that land can be provided to the mill, that will be a big boost to that area. It will provide something in the order of 1,250 hectares of additional caneland. This would be a real answer. I would urge the minister give that every consideration because it would be of enormous benefit to that area.

The Grain Research Foundation Act legislation takes the Grain Research Foundation out of the hands of government and puts it back in the hands of industry. It is a natural historical progression of the foundation. It has done some good work over a period of time. It has the support of industry and is another part of this act that we will be supporting.

There are quite a number of changes to the Veterinary Surgeons Act. There are a number of clauses regarding the keeping of the role of the Veterinary Tribunal. The major issue with veterinary surgeons has been the industrial problems that I mentioned previously. The log of claims that was lodged with the DPIF and QIRC in July 2004 aimed for wage parity with interstate vets. Negotiations with the Beattie Labor government for better pay have continued to be unsuccessful. The government has said that it is part of the whole Public Service package that was negotiated in an EB some three or four years ago. It might be a three- or five-year EB. There have been many instances where particular parts of EB packages have been plucked out for specific professions or specific classes of officers. This is too important an issue when we are dealing with exotic disease and those sorts of issues. Biosecurity is so important. We must have enough vets and they must be adequately and fairly paid in comparison to their interstate colleagues. The difference in salary shortfall is up to \$30,000 compared to New South Wales and Victorian vets.

A spokesman for DPIF said that the matter concerning veterinarians was currently subject to negotiations under the core agreement for the state government, noting that the department had already responded to the union's claim with a 10-point plan; the public can be assured that DPIF has contingency plans in place and disease protection is their highest priority and will not be compromised. If there are no experienced vets it will be compromised.

We are seeing vets withdrawn from centres such as Mount Isa, Cloncurry, Kingaroy, Dalby, Gayndah, Gympie, Bundaberg, Chinchilla and Hughenden. Vacancies that cannot be filled include a senior position at Biloela that was vacant for four months, a position in Charleville and a vet scientist position in Rockhampton which has been advertised for more than a year. This is an issue that needs addressing as a matter of urgency.

The final act that we deal with in this legislation is the Grain Industry (Restructuring) Act 1991. I may have to declare some type of interest because I had shares in Grainco. Anyone who grew grain automatically received shares in Grainco. This is part of the historical development within the grain industry. This act provided for a Queensland review of the wheat marketing arrangements following a national review of the wheat single desk export arrangement. This was the act that set up Grainco Ltd, the former grower owned and controlled grain handling and marketing body. This is a technicality to repeal what has become a redundant piece of legislation because we have moved on from the days of Grainco.

In the time left to me I want to address the importance of having experienced staff in the department of primary industries. One thing that concerns me is the number of temporary and casual staff within the organisation. When referring to veterinary surgeons I pointed out the importance of having a stable, professional and fairly remunerated staff. If one looks at the figures for 2006 for the department of primary industries, 68 per cent were permanent staff; 20.9 per cent—almost 21 per cent—were temporary staff, that was some 793 people; and 11.98 or nearly 12 per cent, or 431 staff, were casual. I know that some of the casual staff might well be the remnants of staff brought in on a casual basis to perform infield inspections and works in relation to outbreaks of fire ants, citrus canker and smut.

The fact that 21 per cent of DPI staff are temporary and only 68 per cent are permanent is of concern. I would like to think that a large number of DPI staff feel they are highly valued and that their job is permanent. I would like them to feel that they always have a good opportunity to get training and use different skills within the work they do so they can be proud of working for the department of primary industries and want to stay there and obtain that corporate knowledge which is so essential when it comes to biosecurity or industry matters. It takes years to get the knowledge that is required in Primary Industries and Fisheries.

I got a briefing only yesterday from a couple of officers regarding fishing and I was quite amazed at the depth of knowledge they had. The thought went through my mind that it takes years and years and years to get that knowledge. We need the staff at primary industries to have that permanency, stability, enduringness and good job satisfaction to ensure that that corporate knowledge is retained and is passed on to the next lot of people who come through.

As I have said, the opposition will support this bill. We can never underestimate the importance of primary industries. When the Prime Minister of Australia recently announced a new \$560 million drought assistance plan, he talked about primary industries as being part of the essence of Australia. Many people from the city or elsewhere have aspired at times to go on to the land. It is there for the recreation of people. Many people are now involved in primary industries through lifestyle blocks, but they also combine together to make a significant contribution. It is part of the decentralised nature of Queensland. Many of our towns and cities spread along the coast and in inland Queensland depend upon primary production. Many of the issues I have talked about today—like biosecurity and drought—are essential to the fabric of our Queensland society.

We do support this bill. I hope the comments I have made during this debate—particularly about drought, biosecurity and the staff at DPI—are of assistance. We will support anything that the minister or the department wants to do that we think advances primary industries in Queensland and provides support to the people who work within them.