



Speech by

Phil Reeves

MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

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FOOD AMENDMENT BILL

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (12.51 pm): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to the Food Amendment Bill. We live in a changing time when, sadly, we need to be aware of the risks of terrorist activity, and intentional contamination of food can be one of the strategies used by terrorists. This bill addresses the importance of ensuring that incidents of possible intentional contamination of food are reported to authorities so that serious matters can be addressed. Importantly, a central repository for reporting of suspected intentional contamination of food ensures that there is a mechanism to monitor and identify any patterns of reported possible intentional contamination. This means that, for example, any attempt to cause public harm by contaminating food at a range of locations can be identified. In instances of suspected intentional contamination of food, Queensland Health will work closely with the Queensland Police Service. If the police form the view that suspected intentional contamination was a suspected terrorist activity, then counter-terrorism procedures would come into play.

The Food Amendment Bill is not the only tool in place to address concerns regarding intentional and malicious food contamination. In 2005 the Queensland government worked with industry to develop a business resource kit 'Counter-terrorism for food service businesses'. This resource kit includes sections on prevention and awareness, incident response and incident recovery.

Since the events of September 11, 2001 there has been a shift in the nature of terrorism and new levels of organisation and sophistication are now being seen. Recent trends indicate a move away from the more traditional forms of attack, for example, hijacking and scare tactics, and an increase in bombings and indiscriminate mass casualty attacks. This threat has implications for venues that attract large gatherings of people, including businesses in the food services industry. By their nature, such venues cater for large numbers of people, often with limited access control and with time and location predictability. For example, everyone knows when lunchtime is and everyone knows when dinner time is. Some food services venues and events have a high profile clientele, and many are located in precincts with well-known tenants who could be of interest to terrorist groups. For these reasons, all businesses, including those in the food services industry, need to consider terrorism as a real and potential threat. Terror attacks do happen in and around food service and hospitality businesses—for example, the Sari Club in Bali and the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta.

Traditionally, the hospitality industry offers an unrestricted, comfortable and relaxed environment for which Queensland is famous, but recent international terrorist activities demand greater awareness of the potential threats that now face this industry. Counter-terrorism measures should now be seriously considered and integrated into business operations.

The resource kit format and style are practical and user friendly. Following a suggestion by industry, its format has been used in guidelines for the food industry on dealing with suspected contaminated food. This means that there is a consistent approach to Queensland Health publications that inform the food industry of their obligations in response to suspected malicious food tampering.

At the 1991 Premiers Conference, agreement was reached that there should be a nationally consistent legislative approach to food regulation as well as the harmonisation of Australia's domestic and

export food standards with international food standards. The Australia New Zealand Food Authority, now known as Food Standards Australia New Zealand, was created to undertake the task of developing and maintaining national food standards which were to be inserted in the food standards code.

Enforcement and policing of food standards rest with the states and territories in Australia. The Commonwealth, through the Imported Food Control Act 1992, enforces the code in relation to food imported into Australia. It is an offence under state and territory food legislation to supply food which does not comply with relevant food standards.

In 2000 all states and territories and the Commonwealth signed an intergovernmental agreement on food regulation. In accordance with the IGA, all states and territories agreed to adopt annex A of a national model food act. Annex A sets out the policy principles and objectives including the legal obligation not to sell or handle food that is unsafe and a requirement that food businesses comply with the code. Annex B of the national model food act deals with a number of issues including registration of food businesses and food safety programs. Adoption of each provision in annex B is discretionary.

The Food Act 2006 is based on the national model food act developed out of this process. It also contains arrangements specific to food regulation in Queensland where local governments have the role of licensing specified food businesses. The model food act was developed nationally and provides the basis for best practice food legislation that is consistent across all states and territories. The development of the model food act was overseen by the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council. Queensland's lead representative on this ministerial council is the Minister for Health.

It should be noted that provisions for mandatory notification of suspected intentional contamination of food are not included in the model food act. The Food Amendment Bill has introduced a proactive provision unique in Australian food regulation and one which other jurisdictions have already expressed interest in. The parliamentary secretary for health described the Food Amendment Bill and its purpose at the last ministerial council meeting in May 2006, and a formal paper will be submitted to the next council meeting in October 2006.

It is likely that requirements to report suspected intentional contamination of food in the Food Amendment Bill will form the basis of a change to food regulation throughout Australia. This bill is another example of Queensland's leadership in best practice in food safety regulation. This response to suspected intentional contamination of food demonstrates our continuing commitment to protecting the health and safety of Queenslanders, and I commend the bill to the House.