



Speech by

Ted Malone

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard Thursday, 2 November 2006

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (3.52 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on the Primary Industries Legislation Amendment Bill. I congratulate the shadow minister for covering all of the issues quite well. There are a few things that I would like to talk about that I have an interest in.

Of course, for anybody on the land now the drought is of the biggest interest to them. Members have spoken very eloquently about the effects of the drought right across Queensland. In my electorate we are fortunate to have two water schemes—the Kinchant scheme, or the Eton scheme, and the Teemburra scheme. The Kinchant water irrigation scheme is based on an off-stream storage dam. Water is pumped from the Pioneer River whenever the water is flowing at a certain level in that river. Fortunately, this year there were enough showers and rain in the valley that there was a good window of opportunity to pump into the dam. Finally, most of the pumps that are installed in the river are running.

The Kinchant scheme is very healthy. The dam, from my last trip there, is almost full. That is not the case with the Teemburra Dam, the latest dam that was built on the Teemburra reach of the Pioneer River. It has zero allocation for the farmers who are connected to it. As members would know from comments by the shadow minister for natural resources in the House today, farmers still face extremely high costs in terms of the part A portion of the irrigation charges that are still allocated to them even though they are receiving no water. At this time of the year farmers are looking to irrigate the ratoon crops and the young plant cane to establish a crop for next year. They are paying out very substantial amounts of money and have zero water allocation. In Victoria some consideration has been given to irrigators in that respect, but that is not so in Queensland. That needs to be looked at very quickly because it is impacting on farmers across Queensland.

The minister was with me last Saturday when CRRISG, the Central Region Rural Innovation and Support Group, had a field day. Basically, that amounts to a group of interested people getting together to form an incorporated body to look at alternative crops and perhaps alternative ways of doing things, and perhaps even looking back into past practices that farmers had participated in many years ago. One of the areas they are working on is the handing down of seeds et cetera from previous generations instead of using seeds that are generated through breeding programs by the seed companies, particularly in the vegetable group.

One of the interesting tests that were done on some of the products that they had on display there was a refractometer test on tomatoes. A refractometer is a very simple mechanism that measures the Brix levels in products. Brix is basically a measure of sugar and nutrients in a product. With sunlight going through a product, people can pick up a measure somewhere between zero and 25. Interestingly, tests done on tomatoes bought out of a supermarket returned a Brix level of around four. Generally, it is considered that anything below about five means that there is very little nutritional value. They then tested tomatoes that were grown naturally with seeds that have been handed down over a period of time. They were not necessarily grown organically, but they were the older style bushes. The Brix level in those tomatoes was 14 or 15. We need to be concerned about some of the products we are buying through our supermarkets and through our distributors of food throughout Queensland.

It is interesting to go on to some of the vegetable farms where product is being prepared for companies such as Woolworths or Coles. The companies are looking for a product that will stay on the shelves for a week and up to two weeks. My father grew tomatoes when I was a young bloke, so I know quite a bit about them. Basically, farmers pick green tomatoes and leave the ripe tomatoes on the ground simply because the green tomatoes last on the shelves longer and do not rot. By doing that, the farmers are truncating the ripening process that comes about naturally from sunlight and water. There is a product that looks like a tomato, and it probably even shines a bit like a tomato after two weeks on the shelves, but it is totally useless in terms of nutrition. I think that would apply to a lot of other products on our supermarket shelves.

It is no good blaming the farmers for that; it is simply because the bigger retailers of our fruit and vegetables are demanding that product from the farm. If the farmers do not supply that product they will never sell another product to the supermarket. It is beholden on our consumers to become a little bit more educated in terms of the nutrition that is available to them through the fresh food market, and perhaps even think a little bit about supporting the farmers by going to market days or buying goods from farmers on the side of the road. People should look at the product that is available to them under that regime rather than following everybody else and lining up at the supermarket and picking product off the shelves that really has very little nutritional value. I sometimes wonder about our nutriment and energy levels. We are probably not accessing the best types of foods that we can. We really should be looking at that.

The field day will also showcase some very innovative issues. Joe Muscat has been working with the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations over a long period of time in the production of sun hemp and kenaf. They are products that have a high fibrous content and are able to be harvested with a modified cane harvester. The products that can be produced out of those two plants are quite unbelievable, as the shadow minister indicated; they can be anything from bumper bars on cars, to food, oils and cloth. There is a whole range of products that we are currently not producing. Indeed, when members look back at the old sailing ships they will see that the ropes were made out of hemp. It is basically the same product. It has a multitude of uses and is easily produced.

Looking at the two different crops of cotton and kenaf or sun hemp, sun hemp and kenaf are basically impervious to diseases and have no great need of chemical sprays. The problem we have, of course, is getting an industry established and getting manufacturers involved, which is quite difficult. Joe has been working with those products, as others have, for three or four years now.

The Central Region Resource Group has as its chair David George with John Ross as its secretary. John has always been a very innovative farmer and certainly thinks outside the square. One of the interesting products at the field day was a diesel tree that was unveiled by Mike Jubow. The trees are currently small seedlings which were imported from Brazil. As the trees grow and become larger they are able to be tapped for a product that will run a diesel motor without any modification at all. It will take a number of years for a tree to mature significantly enough to get any amount of fuel out of it. The fuel is produced in the hardwood. With a stainless steel pipe tapped into the hardwood and the product harvested every few months, the intention is that over a hectare of land a mature crop could produce 5,000 litres of diesel every year. I understand that this crop is being grown quite substantially in Brazil. We will keep an eye on that. That certainly will be one of the alternative fuels sometime down the track.

The other initiatives that were demonstrated were a tree planter, a grass mulcher, a yeomans shakeaerator and keyline farming principals. In the afternoon there was a macadamia nut demonstration. Macadamia nuts are not normally grown north of Rockhampton but there seems to be a need to look at experimentation in terms of perhaps a macadamia nut plantation in the central Queensland region.

At this stage I congratulate Paul and Bridget Feneck for the very successful second sale that they held at Sarina last Saturday. Paul and Bridget have set up a magnificent complex outside of Sarina and with innovative breeding they are producing world-class cattle. Buyers from all over the world have visited to bid and look at the cattle. The sale was very successful with more than 800 people attending.

Others today have spoken about biosecurity. Quite frankly, from the point of view of primary industries that is probably one of the most important things that primary industry can be aware of. Others have talked about the BSE situation in America. With the identification of one or two cattle the American and Canadian beef industry was stymied. The export of meat out of America and Canada was totally banned and its markets were totally tied up.

If we were unfortunate enough to ever have a BSE identification here in Australia it would absolutely ruin the cattle industry in Queensland. With the introduction of the NLIS program we are able to produce an instant trace back to cattle. If ever we were in a situation where that might happen we would be able to identify the property almost instantaneously and then take steps to eradicate the situation.

The other issue that is of threat to primary industry is the woody weeds issue. It does not necessarily come under primary industry, but it is certainly an impediment to primary industry. When one looks at the spread of the giant rat's tail weed around the country and looks at properties that have been devastated by

that weed one realises the extent of economic loss. It is almost impossible for cattle to feed in a paddock that is heavily infested with giant rat's tail. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate, particularly in inaccessible country. It has migrated into areas that are very difficult to get equipment into. Giant rat's tail totally takes over the property and, as I said, it is almost impossible to manage.

The other emerging issue, which has been around for some time, is dingoes crossing with domestic dogs and, more particularly, pig dogs. This is having a real impact on not necessarily only rural areas but urban areas that stretch out into rural areas where dogs are now moving into the outskirts of town attacking domestic dogs. There does not seem to be any real mechanism to control those dogs. Obviously in a populated area shooting becomes problematic and, more importantly, poisoning is problematic as well. We really do not have an efficient way of disposing of those dogs.

The situation in relation to pigs is similar. The growth and the extraordinary number of pigs coming out of national parks and state owned forests is amazing. I have seen groups of up to 100 pigs in caneland. The other night I was riding down to feed cattle molasses and I could feel something running quite close to me in the middle of a paddock. Thinking it was a dog I looked down; it was quite a large pig, almost a metre high. With those few words I commend the bill to the House.