




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (9.06 pm): In speaking to the Agriculture and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill 2013, it says the policy objective is to amend the following eight acts: the Agricultural Chemical Distribution Control Act; the Agricultural Standards Act 1994; the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001; the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008; the Forestry Act 1959; the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002; the Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994; and the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936.

We have heard many speakers here tonight, and I cannot fault many of them because there are a lot of very important and serious issues in relation to animal care, biosecurity, the protection of veterinarians, feral animals, noxious weeds, stock routes and national parks. All of these things are very important to my rural electorate. I have spent most of my time in rural and regional Queensland and I have seen the devastation caused by feral animals. The member for Burdekin previously mentioned the shooting of over 4,000 feral cats. During estimates I questioned the minister regarding the problem of feral cats, and I was very impressed by the minister's response. I think the scale of the operation is probably too big for a state government to be able to manage. Just to name a few examples of feral animals, there are pigs, cane toads and also feral cats.

On my small property outside of Charters Towers I saw a sugar glider that had been ripped in half by a feral cat. When you go to most waterways, especially dam sites with a few trees around, you can guarantee that every day you will see birds that have been ripped to shreds by feral cats. There are millions of feral cats that are out there and every day they feed on lizards, native birds, native wildlife and mammals, and that is a loss to our Australian wildlife. I cannot fault the minister for this, but at the same time the scale of this problem requires federal government support. Feral pigs are some of the biggest environmental vandals. They dig up turtle eggs, eat cassowary eggs and rip up the river systems. There is a huge cost factor to the farming industry and the agriculture industry, and it just goes on and on.

I think they estimated only recently that there are over 20 million feral pigs throughout Australia, with six million feral pigs in Northern Queensland. That is a phenomenal number and is probably more than six times the human population in that region. Those pigs are out there destroying the countryside. Those pigs were introduced by Captain Cook. That is why they call many of these pigs the captain cooker pigs.

The Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act talks about eliminating feral pigs. The Staaten River National Park, which is around 6,000 square kilometres, is a haven for feral animals and noxious weeds. Many years ago that area was part of the old Strathmore Station. There is an opportunity for hunters to address the issue of feral pigs by providing a reasonable bounty of \$40 or \$50 each. Most pig hunters go out there on their own time and at their own expense. They enjoy going out, but a bounty would provide a little incentive.

It is the same with a bounty for feral cats. As I have said to the minister, the scale of this operation is massive. If we were to really do something about the feral cat problem we would need the support of the federal government. In terms of feral pigs, yes, we can shoot them out of helicopters,

but we also have our younger generation who are itching to do things. They love going bush, camping, boiling the billy, spending money on their four-wheel drives and crates and contributing to outdoor businesses like camping and fishing shops. It is economy within itself. And it does society a favour.

I know that this bill addresses many issues with regard to vets. I commend vets for the work they do. When someone calls a vet and says, 'We have a sick horse,' nobody knows what that horse has. That horse could have hendra virus, yet the vet does not necessarily know that. So they are at great risk right from the beginning. In order to look after not just the vets but also the people, you need to reduce the risk and play a part in eliminating the risk. As we have seen, flying foxes are continually flapping around this state—day in and day out. They never stop. I believe that this government has taken a stronger stance on the issue, but that does not mean the problem has been resolved. If you go to townships where flying foxes continue to roost, you can examine whether the government is doing a good job on this issue. Somewhere along the line, if you want to get rid of the risk you have to dramatically reduce flying fox numbers. When flying foxes flap into communities they represent a serious health risk. Eliminating that health risk is in the best interests of the people, the community and the vets.

I believe there are presently over 80 cases of hendra virus. I think there have been about five deaths attributed to hendra virus. There have also been a number of deaths attributed to lyssavirus. Just one death is one death too many. This bill has many good points. Some of the issues that have been raised in the debate are commendable. I bring that to the attention of the House.