




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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EXHIBITED ANIMALS BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (4.10 pm): I rise to speak on the Exhibited Animals Bill 2015—a bill which reflects the LNP bill introduced in the last parliament on 14 October 2014 by the member for Toowoomba South, the former minister for agriculture, fisheries and forestry, the honourable Dr John McVeigh. I am pleased the new Minister for Agriculture, Bill Byrne, has brought this bill before the House in a prompt fashion. I am pleased that he saw the importance of finalising the work that was started by Dr John McVeigh. I acknowledge the hard work of the former minister who spent three long years—or two years and 10 months—rebuilding the department of agriculture after it had been dismantled by the previous Labor government.

It took an LNP government to introduce the Exhibited Animals Bill after many, many years of Labor government dillydallying. In fact, there had been seven years of ongoing discussions, reviews and workshops, starting in 2007. That is not exactly record breaking. When we came into government we sought to rectify the process and get the bill underway. I concede that it was a legacy issue which needed a resolution. It was our government that made this happen. Dr John McVeigh said on 14 October—

It took the LNP to get the ball rolling by releasing a detailed proposal in a regulatory impact statement for public comment.

The LNP involved 17 industry participants to discuss the working draft of the bill. At the time Dr McVeigh said it—

Sends a clear message that the LNP recognises the importance of the exhibited animals industry.

The LNP remains committed to this important industry—ensuring that in Queensland it can grow and become more prosperous. Clearly, as the shadow minister for agriculture and growing up and living in regional areas, I have a great affinity for animals and will work to uphold the rules and legislation that underpin the care and protection of animals whether exhibited, on farms or exported.

The RSPCA had a few things to say with regard to this bill. It is really happy that the bill is bringing all the different types of exhibited animals—whether they are in zoos, circuses, demonstrations, petting zoos—under one bill and considered the bill a step forward. They said—

We really think that this is a great step forward. We believe that animals in any of those different circumstances deserve the same welfare requirements.

This principle needs to be applied equally across all legislation. I acknowledge and appreciate that this has been a big task but it is not complete. In Queensland, the exhibition and dealing with native and exotic animals is regulated under three acts and associated regulations and administered via six licensing schemes with varying preconditions, restrictions, application forms and application and permit fees applying.

Under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the associated regulation, a wildlife exhibitor licence is required to display protected, international or prohibited wildlife at a fixed location with permanent enclosures for the animals, while a wildlife demonstrator licence is needed for travelling or

temporary display of these wildlife. Under the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002 a declared pest permit is required to keep and exhibit animals in a zoo or other fixed exhibit, in a circus and for the purpose of magic acts. Under the Fisheries Act, a general fisheries permit is required for keeping noxious or regulated fish. The bill's explanatory notes point out that exhibitors of native and exotic species of animals generally need at least two licences.

The Zoo and Aquarium Association made submissions and appeared before the Agriculture and Environment Committee. This association states that they have been working with the Queensland government since 2006 to establish exhibited animals specific legislation. The association believes that consultation for the purpose of developing codes of practice and guidelines should only involve government and affected members of the industry. In the bill consultation involves relevant entities such as community groups.

Developing a workable framework for exhibited animals is not without its challenges given the stated position of groups such as Animals Australia and Animal Liberation Queensland. Their aim is to see the demise of the exhibited animals industry. Such consultation, therefore, is an opportunity for them to impose costly and unworkable conditions on the operation of legal and legitimate businesses. These groups have no investment or jobs at stake and government should not provide the opportunity for them to undermine this vital Queensland industry.

Some 14 million people visit Australian zoos each year. Five million of them come to Queensland. Over a third of visitors to Australian zoos visit our great zoos.

Mr Powell: And why is that?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Because we have zoos like Australia Zoo, which is in the electorate of the member for Caloundra but which the member for Glass House is always talking about. My daughter Elke enjoyed her 10th or 11th birthday being a helper at Australia Zoo. She had an absolutely fabulous day with all the animals.

The tourism industry very much benefits from those five million people who visit our zoos. That figure is increasing each and every year. We also have great little zoos like the Darling Downs Zoo. My three children—Isabella, Lucy and Elke—have all been to the Darling Downs Zoo with their great-aunt Charmaine and enjoyed it very much.

When Dr John McVeigh bought the Exhibited Animals Bill before the House in 2014 the bill had two main goals. The goals were: firstly, to consolidate and streamline the provisions relating to exhibited animals into one act; and, secondly, to allow for a wider range of animals to be exhibited in Queensland. Why is this bill so important to Queensland? I know that all of the members on this side of the House are riveted, as is the minister, by the Exhibited Animals Bill.

The exhibited animal industry contributes at least \$100 million to the Queensland economy each year. Our state is nationally and internationally recognised as one of the best places in the world to see animals of all types up close. It brings enjoyment and education to thousands of people each year and, in particular, keeps us in touch with the native wildlife and amazing animals that we have here in Australia—for example, the platypus.

There are three main types of animal exhibitors: our zoos and aquariums; our travelling circuses; and our mobile demonstrators like Dreamtime Reptiles, a successful business run by South Burnett—Nanango—constituents Garry Sippel and Rob Preston. They showcase native reptiles at all of our local shows, schools, shopping centres and major events. Honestly, if people in this House have been to local country shows, particularly at the southern end of Queensland, they and their family and friends would most likely have seen this wonderful South Burnett business Dreamtime Reptiles. They add amazing value to shows for schoolchildren and visitors to our country shows.

The current legislation for exhibiting animals is fragmented. There are provisions spread across four acts and regulations. I would like to touch on some of the recommendations made by the committee. I was pleased to hear that in the amendments which the minister will be moving he has taken on the recommendations of the committee. I would like to thank all members of the committee for their timeliness in bringing this bill before the House.

Recommendation 2, for example, recommends amending the bill to allow mobile exhibitors an opportunity to assess risk and propose management actions for category C exotic animals. The approach suggested is to clarify that the exhibitor's home base satisfies the definition of a regular enclosure and that this enclosure need not be open to the public provided it meets proper standards. I believe this is an important recommendation which takes into account the needs of mobile exhibitors, such as my great South Burnett exhibitor which I was just talking about, which operate quite

differently from fixed exhibitors such as Australia Zoo or Darling Downs Zoo. Mobile exhibitors who made submissions and attended the public hearing clearly expressed their concerns about this aspect of the bill which had disadvantages to their businesses. I am really pleased that this recommendation has been accepted.

Recommendations 3 and 4 also consider the concerns raised by mobile exhibitors in relation to the minimum annual hours an animal must be exhibited and the minimum time per exhibition. This is because mobile exhibitors typically exhibit animals for shorter durations—for example, if they are following a show circuit. I am encouraged by the recommendations which suggest that each time an animal is exhibited this would be counted as the time the animal was exhibited and that the minimum exhibition hours be reduced from 900 to 600 hours per year. These are sensible recommendations which deserve consideration.

Finally, I would like to comment on recommendation 6, which I know the minister addressed, which addresses concerns around proposed management plans. My colleague and close friend the deputy chair of the committee, the honourable member for Burnett, has spent some time discussing proposed management plans with me. While I appreciate management plans do provide more flexibility than strict regulations, concerns were expressed through the submissions that the writing of management plans for all species in their care may become onerous and time consuming. Obviously a management plan for my favourite animal, the platypus, would be completely different—that is why I was grinning before when the minister mentioned a couple of his favourite animals—from a management plan for some of the other animals which are listed which are so varied. There is a freshwater crocodile alongside a koala. Obviously management plans would need to take into account those sorts of things.

The recommendation is therefore to request that the department consider alternative licensing requirements along with the potential for more efficient management plans which aim to reduce the regulatory burden rather than increase it. As my role in the previous government for the first two years was the assistant minister for red-tape reduction, I was very pleased to see that in the bill. I would encourage this approach so small business operators are not bogged down in paperwork and instead are getting out doing what they do best—keeping us in touch with and educating us on our valuable Queensland wildlife.

Creating the capacity to educate through schools is an important purpose of the Exhibited Animals Act. They have been very popular with school groups. On this point I want to emphasise the importance of educating our children not only on food security and where our food comes from but also on our animals in Queensland. We do have some valuable exotic animals in Queensland. I think it is extremely important that we teach not only our children from the city but also our country kids where their food comes from. Milk does not come from a carton; it comes from a dairy cow. Our steak does not come from a cryovac pack; it comes from a beef cattle producer. Our nice lamb chops do not come from Woolies or Coles; they come from a sheep producer like the Leader of the Opposition, the honourable Lawrence Springborg.

Mr Mander: They come from sheep, not sheep producers.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Well, sheep producers allow the sheep to be grown. I think it is so important that we educate our children on not only where our food comes from but also the importance of our exotic species such as saltwater crocodiles, platypus, koalas and some of the other animals I have talked about.

With exotic species exhibited through schools, we are able to look at animal adaptations and different animals adapting in different parts of the world. This allows our children to learn, show and teach other kids about this. To see a tortoise compared with a turtle, for example, shows a child how these animals survive in their own environment. There is always the TV and there is always Google, but the joy brought to children to see and sometimes touch their favourite species which they would only have been able to see on a flat screen is seriously remembered by schoolchildren for many years to come.

For Queensland to fully realise its potential for increased agricultural production, we need to secure export markets and higher farmgate returns for our producers. Both China and Indonesia are set to become even stronger trading partners and markets for our farm products. So let us educate the world about our amazing farm products. There is a strong focus on how animals are treated in Australia and overseas when exported. These countries are also witnessing the rise of community expectations. This is why the frameworks protecting the conditions of animals are so critical and deserve the attention this legislation affords.

In Australia we have some animal activists who are very keen to score points against our very important animal industries as well as animals in recreation and sport. They are very persistent in their observations, and they have looked very closely at circuses and zoos for years and years. This fundamentalism needs to be managed, and maintaining a strong set of rules for animal welfare, care and protection is paramount.