




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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AGRICULTURE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (5.24 pm): It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Agriculture and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Of course, the seat of Gregory is all about agriculture. It depends on agriculture. Members only need to look at the seat of Gregory to see the high-intensity industries such as the feedlot industries and the horticultural industries and cotton industries on the eastern side of the electorate.

Mr Crandon: Around Emerald.

Mr MILLAR: Around Emerald, absolutely. I take that interjection. In the western part of the electorate we have the vast Mitchell grass, gidgee and mulga country that supports our cattle and wool industries. Yes, it is in drought at the moment and things are tough, but I can tell the members in this House and the people of Queensland that once it does rain and the drought breaks those areas will be wealth-creating regions for the rest of Queensland. They are certainly ready to go when the rains come. We pray that they come very soon. We are heading into our fourth season without a wet season. It is certainly biting hard.

The Agriculture and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is dear to me being the son of a farmer, a grandson of a grazier, a great-grandson of a grazier and a great-great-grandson of a grazier. I guess agriculture has always been in my blood and will always be in my blood. I believe that agriculture is one of the mainstay commodities of the Queensland economy. As the Asian economies move towards middle class and higher class we need to be able to take advantage of their economies and make sure that our high-end agriculture—which it is; it is the best agriculture in the world—can certainly meet those market demands.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the former minister for agriculture, John McVeigh, who has certainly been involved in a lot of these issues that we are discussing today. I had the great pleasure of working with John McVeigh. He certainly was passionate about agriculture. Like me, he is a son of a farmer. He comes from agricultural industries on the Darling Downs. His chosen profession was agriculture. He did such a great job with that.

I remember the three things that the former minister was very passionate about. The first is biosecurity. Something he knew from his experience, not only as a professional in agriculture but also as a former employee of DPI and coming from agriculture, is that biosecurity is incredibly important. Issues such as FMD are important. The issue of wild dogs is something that he was very passionate about.

I also acknowledge the shadow minister for agriculture, Deb Frecklington. She is another person from the land and with a long history on the land. She is passionate about this. She is doing a great job in advocating on behalf of the agricultural industry.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the member for Warrego. We joined this parliament together. We represent two of the big five seats—Warrego and Gregory. We have such vast electorates

with such vast agricultural industries. If we go towards Chinchilla and the eastern part of Warrego we find that it has the same issues I have such as high-intensity agricultural industries like feedlotting and horticulture. If we head out to the western part of Warrego we find the fantastic mulga country. It is very important to us.

I also mention the member for Burdekin who has the sugar industry in his electorate. The member for Burnett has that industry in his electorate as well. There are plenty of people with experience in agriculture on our side of politics. I acknowledge the Minister for Agriculture for bringing the Agriculture and Other Legislation Amendment Bill to the House.

I wish to speak to the amendments to the Exotic Diseases in Animal Act 1981 and welcome them. They will provide what I see is imperative, essential and urgently needed which is much more timely notices of restricted areas and standstill zones in the event of an animal disease outbreak. This is essential if we are to keep our state clean and free from exotic pests and diseases. Queensland has a reputation right around the world as one of the safest and cleanest areas for agricultural production and we must protect that.

Our clean and green reputation is our marketing edge on other countries and even on our interstate rivals as we move to capitalise on the growth in the Asian markets, especially the high-end markets, that our products—whether they be beef, dairy, grains, horticulture or sugar, just to name a few—need to take advantage of. We need to protect our clean, green image that we have.

The current EDIA Act requires the minister to issue a notice under subordinate legislation to establish a restricted area and a standstill zone, which requires a notice drafted by the Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel and approved by the Governor in Council. This is not only time consuming but unnecessary. It also has the potential to put our industry at further risk because of the unnecessary time and red tape it takes to get this done. When we have an exotic disease incursion in Queensland, we need to move quickly. You only have to look at issues such as FMD to see why we need to move quickly. The changes will allow notifications to be made by the chief executive at short notice to better deal with any major animal disease outbreaks. This is needed if we are to deal—and I hope we never have to—with an outbreak of FMD, where restricted areas and standstill notices would need to be implemented immediately with no time delay.

Queensland is a state that has coastlines that have close exposure to our neighbouring countries such as Indonesia. Amendments are not restricted to weekday business hours. Disease and pest incursions do not stick to a working week and do not stick to a nine to five day. For example, the major horse influenza outbreak in 2007 was detected at a large horse sports event at Warwick on a Saturday. It was not on a Monday. It was not at 9.30 in the morning when we are ready to go. It was on a Saturday. During any disease outbreak, it is vital that prompt action and especially movement restrictions are in place as quickly as possible because any delays can potentially make eradication far more difficult and costly.

I want to quickly move to one of my pet issues, and that is wild dogs. They are having a major impact on my electorate in Western Queensland. We need the wool industry back in Western Queensland. We need the rebirth of the wool industry back in Western Queensland. We need to get on top of wild dogs, because wild dogs are having a devastating impact on the wool industry and small towns and communities—places like Muttaborra, Aramac, Longreach, Blackall, Yaraka, Stonehenge, Quilpie, Windorah and then, if you move across to the member for Warrego's electorate, Charleville where they are having a major impact on the wool industry. I remember back in the eighties and nineties there were six shearing contractors in the town of Muttaborra alone. I remember that well—when playing for the Longreach Rams in Rugby Union, we used to go up to Muttaborra and it was like playing the All Blacks.

Mr Costigan: How times have changed!

Mr MILLAR: Times have changed but we do need a wool industry. Amendments to the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 will enable landholders to destroy dogs attacking or about to attack stock on their land. I think that is important. Section 95 of the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002 currently authorises a landholder or an authorised person to destroy a dog that is attacking or about to attack stock on the property if the dog is not under someone's control. It protects the landowner from criminality liability and having to pay compensation for the dog's destruction. I think that is very important.

For far too long we have had dogs stray from owners and wreak havoc on properties and destroy stock not only out in Western Queensland but also in coastal areas. As the member for Whitsunday would have seen, dogs are now able to bring down calves and even small cattle. We have to have responsible dog owners. I know we have a lot of responsible dog owners in Queensland, but not everyone is a responsible dog owner. There are those people who have little regard to what impact

their dogs might be having on properties close by. What is devastating—and I can tell members this from experience, and I hope they never have to see it—is to see sheep and lambs destroyed by dogs, going out the next morning and finding that dogs have attacked nine, 10 or 11 sheep and taken down 20 lambs and seeing them on the ground. It is a heartbreaking and cruel way for those animals to die.

We need to do everything we can to make sure that we get wild dogs under control and allow cattle producers but also wool producers and lamb producers to be able to confidently know that their stock are in a protected area—that they are not being attacked by feral animals and they are not being attacked by wild dogs. What is even more heartbreaking than anything else is that those dogs that do attack those sheep are dogs that come from town. They are domesticated animals that owners are not keeping on the chain at night that do have an impact on nearby properties close to town. I commend the changes to that legislation to make sure that property owners have the right to be able to destroy a dog if they see it on their place uncontrolled. I commend the bill to the House.