Speech By

Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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EXHIBITED ANIMALS REGULATION

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

Mr BENNETT (Burnett—LNP) (7.56 pm): In addressing the contribution by the member for Gladstone, who, I must add, was actually a good chair of the Agriculture and Environment Committee—and I have a lot of respect for the way that he conducted the committee—I do point out that when this bill was done a year or so ago I do not remember any consultation about being in line with your ability to pay. I do not think a modern democracy would talk about people's capacity to pay based on their earnings. This disallowance motion is not about wanting to scrap the regulation at all; it is about wanting the department to go back and start to deal with the key stakeholders about fair regulation. The industry never said they were against paying what is fair and reasonable; what they are objecting to is how they have not been consulted. I think they would take offence to three-year-old debate references being used. You must be talking to different people, member for Gladstone, if you have had industry feedback that says they have been consulted. Clearly they want to be charged fairly, and all we are asking is that the department take the time to go back to this industry and put what is fair and reasonable. I think Queenslanders deserve that as well.

There is a need for a disallowance motion, as the unintended consequences of this are an unfair burden on an innocent industry. There is a need for a disallowance motion, as the real outcome is that the minister must finally make just one decision in the interests of important community concerns. We need the minister to facilitate real industry engagement to find a fair and workable solution while facilitating community discussion to resolve the issue. We would also expect an apology for the many offensive and insulting comments in the media referring to the Zoo and Aquarium Association, particularly in the local media. We expect more from a local member who should be fighting for this sector. The industry was quite upset and insulted by the reference to it not being efficient or having the genuine interests of animal welfare at heart. The zoo industry deserves better recognition of the value and professionalism it brings to the state and the national economy, tourism and education.

The policy objectives are in the explanatory notes. It is important that the members of the agriculture committee remember what happened. The objective of the bill was to provide for exhibiting and dealing with exhibited animals while ensuring that animal welfare, biosecurity and safety risks are minimised. The bill also seeks to consolidate and streamline regulation of the exhibited animals industry which is currently spread across several acts. Clearly these regulations fail.

Reforms that reduce red tape and support viable business and tourism activity are what we all in this place want to achieve. No-one can argue, and the industry recognises, that a reasonable fee for processing is fair, but at the first test the minister has allowed an obscene increase in regulatory burden. Last year the committee heard that the bill would reduce the regulatory burden on exhibitors—that has not happened—and that it is consistent with the government's red-tape-reduction commitments. We all hoped that would be the case when the regulations were brought forward some months ago.

Exhibitors raised concerns with the committee about the requirement to prepare management plans, potential duplication with other legislation, application and renewal processes for authorities, and administrative requirements associated with reporting, notification and record keeping. The industry needs an equitable and level playing field on species available to be obtained freely by pet owners. Why should zoos be burdened by a management plan when the same species can be purchased in a pet shop without such need?

Mr Power interjected.

Mr BENNETT: It is a good question. Maybe the member could answer it.

Problems and concerns in relation to management plans led to a committee comment, which states—

The committee acknowledges the intent and potential value of management plans but are concerned that the scope of this requirement, extending to all exhibitors for all species of animals including lower risk species and those that may be kept by private citizens for recreational use …

…

This is therefore an area where red tape and regulatory burden has in fact increased for industry.

…

The committee has not contemplated a specific amendment in relation to management plans but sees merit in limiting the scope and reach of the management plan requirements to reduce the regulatory impact and costs for animal exhibitors.

If government members of the Agriculture and Environment Committee want to rewrite the report on the Exhibited Animals Bill from a year ago, maybe they need to go back to the words they put their names to and signed off on. Clearly, tonight they are in contradiction of that committee report, which was a bipartisan report based on the understanding that the committee's recommendations would be listened to. The committee comment continues—

It may be necessary to review the consistency of provisions including clauses 37, 53, 58, 63-65, 69, 77, 80, 132-133 …

Members can guess what happened. All were ignored. Point for clarification A states—

The committee invites the Minister to inform the House how his department will consult animal exhibitors, including mobile exhibitors not represented by a peak body, during the development of regulations, guidelines, codes and template documents …

They say they have not even heard from the minister. Point for clarification C states—

The committee invites the Minister to assure the House that the department will consult with animal exhibitors before prescribing any matters by regulation …

The disallowance is supported with the committee report and the department's assurances to the committee, which state—

Broad communication to the general public about these Acts, which both include a general obligation that will impact keepers of animals, will occur in the lead up to their commencement which must occur before 1 July 2016. The communication strategy will include internal communication to ensure government officers are able to engage and educate stakeholders on the changes …

The Zoo and Aquarium Association challenges that assumption. Of course, they did talk about doing an information session on social media. It is another example of clear failure which further justifies this disallowance motion.

At the time, the committee was satisfied with the assurances that have clearly not been undertaken. We do not support the new regulations as they stand due to a lack of meaningful industry consultation, a lack of documented transparency in the application of fees, excessive cost increases and an unworkable level of new regulatory burden. The disallowance motion will force the department to go back to the table and engage with key stakeholders including the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia—something that is fair and reasonable.

There will be increased red-tape burden as a result of these regulations. Permit holders will now be required to generate an extensive management plan for each species on the permit. For most zoos with even moderate sized collections this may represent several hundred pages of new work. The public can buy a common native species in a pet shop by applying for a recreational permit online and they are not required to demonstrate a management plan. Zoos holding these same species are now expected to pay the same fee as if applying to keep a tiger or a lion. All holders are expected to transition to the new system as of 1 July as each licence is due for renewal. This results in entire applications for some facilities requiring collation before the application process has been developed. This represents a huge administrative burden, and there is not even a phased roll-out. The department has advised that in some cases it will be cheaper to simply apply for an entirely new permit, at some thousands of dollars, than to try to effect amendments to existing ones where a host of changes are sought.

Fees are based on either a minor or a major change to the newly required management plan. The fee to add a species of animal or change an enclosure has increased by over 2,700 per cent. Minor changes are set to have a fee of over $150. Fees are set for minor and major changes to permits of approximately $150 and $453 respectively and will increase annually with CPI. There is no stated definition of a 'minor' versus 'major' amendment. It will come down to the government's discretion. This is unworkable and open to bias. This is in addition to licence renewal fees, which can amount to thousands of dollars.

All members should support this disallowance motion, if the intention is to facilitate good policy outcomes. Members of the Agriculture and Environment Committee should be offended and should support their recommendations, which have been ignored. Let us allow the department to engage and develop consultative policy that is fair and meets the expectations of Queenslanders. I ask the minister to start to fight for Queenslanders and show real leadership. Let us strive for good policy in Queensland.