




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 17 September 2019

MEDICINES AND POISONS BILL

THERAPEUTIC GOODS BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (12.29 pm): This is a significant piece of legislation. It will repeal and replace existing legislation with a new regulatory framework that has greater alignment with national regulations. In creating a new regulatory framework it, amongst other things, provides greater assurance to the community that the medicines, poisons and therapeutic goods they use are regulated by a modern, outcomes focused framework that enhances public safety. The bill streamlines requirements for prescribing medicinal cannabis in Queensland by enabling non-specialist medical practitioners to prescribe without the need for approval from Queensland Health, eliminating duplication in the Commonwealth approvals process. I will talk more about the medicinal cannabis issue in my electorate.

There are real benefits from these advancements. I will talk about an enterprise that has evolved over the last 20 years. The expansion in research and development by THC Global will create 75 to 85 direct jobs in my region and another 80 jobs in South-East Queensland over the next 18 to 24 months. THC Global has secured 6.6 hectares of existing hydroponic greenhouses in Bundaberg which will be repurposed for cannabis cultivation subject to final licensing. An additional 18 hectares of agricultural land has been secured for a proposed open-field cannabis cultivation operation. Initial production is expected to produce 80,000 kilograms of dried cannabis flower grown hydroponically. Securing an existing hydroponics operation allows production to commence almost immediately following the granting of licences and permits by the Office of Drug Control.

THC Global will be the primary supplier of medicinal cannabis flower to THC Global's facility in Southport as early as next year. This is a major step in being able to deliver Australian produced medicinal cannabis products to Australian patients on a commercial scale in 2020. THC Global Group advises that it has secured agreement to lease a property with 66,000 square metres of existing hydroponic greenhouses and an additional 180,000 square metres of agricultural land for the cultivation of medicinal cannabis in our region. The 66,000 square metres of hydroponic greenhouses on the property are able to be easily repurposed. This is a great step forward. We are looking forward to the hemp cultivation and its benefits.

Within the next 14 days I understand that THC Global will submit a request to the Australian Office of Drug Control for the property to be an additional cultivation site under the existing licence held by THC Global's subsidiary, Canndeo. Canndeo currently holds all three cannabis licences in Australia and has its primary operations at another facility in Bundaberg. THC Global expects to be able to produce an initial 80,000 kilograms of dried cannabis flower annually. There is potential to increase its capacity through its open-field cultivation area. This is important in terms of medicinal cannabis. THC Global will explore using part of the open-field land for hemp cultivation, potentially enabling THC Global to enter the food and nutrition and cosmetic markets globally. We would all agree that that would be a great outcome.

The medicinal cannabis cultivated at the property will be processed at the company's Southport facility. I welcome the federal health minister coming to Southport a couple of weeks ago to open that facility. As we know, it is capable of producing good manufacturing practice certified active pharmaceutical ingredients as well as the full-spectrum and broad-spectrum extracts. That is an exciting development for the great state of Queensland. Access to an additional cultivation site, which could be in production within a month, would support the rapid acceleration of production at the Southport facility.

I acknowledge chief executive officer, Ken Charteris. Ken has commented that the facility in Bundaberg complements existing cannabis production assets THC Global has around Australia. In addition to seeking ODC approvals for the existing hydroponic greenhouses on the property for the cultivation of medicinal cannabis, THC Global intends to explore the potential to use part of its open-field agricultural land on the property for hemp cultivation as the company considers nutrition and food and cosmetic markets as an additional revenue stream for the company. THC Global is in a unique position to enter this hemp based market due to being an existing licence and permit holder under the regulatory scheme for medicinal cannabis. The extraction of hemp is another exciting development. Research and development and science are being undertaken in this regard. Entering into this market would take advantage of THC Global's significant expertise, experience and infrastructure available.

The terms of the lease for the property will be settled in conjunction with the application for the property, which is owned to Eden Farms. It is a local farming enterprise that has been involved in food production since 1985. They are now in partnership with THC Global. We know that THC Global operates under a farm-to-pharma pharmaceutical model, holding all three cannabis licences being a research licence, a medicinal cannabis licence and two manufacturing licences through its domestic medicinal cannabis subsidiaries, THC Pharma and Canndeo. THC Global is in a prime position to commence medicinal cannabis production to service both domestic patients and the global export market. We know for domestic patients that access to the product is quite expensive. Any expansion in this market will hopefully make these products more affordable.

THC Global is active globally with operations in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. They have partnerships across Europe, Asia and the Middle East. In addition to its core Australian medicinal cannabis assets, THC Global has a significant Canadian presence both in cannabis and hydroponics equipment. This puts us in a great position to make sure the Australian operations are successful.

Eden Farms has joined these exciting projects. Eden Farms was established in 1983 at Highfields, Queensland. They were the first suppliers of continental cucumbers on the east coast of Australia. Their producing farm area spans 12 hectares of greenhouses in three locations. They have been market leaders for two decades and dominate the marketplace in the supply of horticultural products through production innovation. Eden Farms is proud to be a pioneer of fresh food direct to market. We are excited that Eden Farms has teamed up with this enterprise. I acknowledge John and Penny Hall and David and Ruth Gillespie for their persistence and dedication to the industry over 20 years and Ken Charteris and THC Global for their confidence in the Burnett electorate.

Going back to the bill—and thank you for your leniency in allowing me to go where I went—I note that the committee made 10 recommendations. We recommend that the minister accept those recommendations. The recommendations talk about clarification of the management plans and the development and rollout of comprehensive communication strategies. We want to make sure the bill is passed. I will end my contribution there to allow other speakers to contribute. I commend the bill to the House.