




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Record of Proceedings, 6 February 2020

AGRICULTURE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (12.53 pm): I rise to support the Agriculture and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. Agriculture production is incredibly important to Rockhampton. Rockhampton, as the beef city, is reliant on the broader agricultural sector for certainty. Although outside my electorate, the employment provided by the two meatworks is essential for the city's economy, any biosecurity risks could shut down these plants where the impacts on jobs would be enormous. I know of concerns in my community about protesters targeting agriculture production sites and abattoirs. Rockhampton constituents support animal welfare but not illegal activities.

Sadly, the actions of some animal rights protesters have put the welfare of animals that they claim to care for at risk. People entering farmland to protest could knowingly or unknowingly introduce pests and diseases on to that farmland. Animals will suffer if a serious disease is introduced to a farm as a result of the action of these protesters. Often, their protest action causes animals to become stressed, and in some cases there are injuries and even deaths of animals.

These protesters are extremists whose aim is to close all animal industries. It is difficult for the industry to engage with them in a meaningful way to address their concerns, because they oppose all farming of animals. Nevertheless, industry and government are working hard to raise animal welfare standards. Queensland has a robust system implemented through the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001. It provides a high level of welfare protection for animals and ensures compliance with other animal welfare laws.

These protections extend not only to companion animals but also to animals used in agriculture. In part, the act provides that one of its purposes is to provide standards for the care and use of animals that achieve a reasonable balance between the welfare of animals and the interests of persons whose livelihood depends on the animals. The duty-of-care provisions in the act oblige people to provide for their animals' needs for food and water, accommodation, living conditions and the display of normal patterns of behaviour, the treatment of disease and injury, and appropriate handling.

In some instances, it may be appropriate for livestock production animals to undergo husbandry procedures that would not be appropriate for companion animals. Codes of practice for production animals help identify where such practices are appropriate.

Many in my community support and respect people's rights to lawful protest. However, the perception that the government does not have adequate oversight of animal welfare in this state is misinformed. Nothing can excuse the behaviour affecting farmers and others engaged in the agricultural production business that sometimes puts the welfare of the animals themselves at risk.

I also refer to fisheries. Through clause 95, this bill amends section 35 to clarify that 'waters' includes foreshores and non-tidal land. This clause is necessary to describe some regulated waters which encompass foreshores and non-tidal land, for example where the habitat of fish extends to these areas or activities in relation to the taking of fish from the foreshore. In Rockhampton, there is great pride in the success of the net-free zones—opposed by the LNP, I might add—and there is always great local interest in any changes to fisheries.

In terms of the closure of the Queensland agricultural training colleges, in 2018 there were some interesting comments from those opposite. The Queensland agricultural training colleges have been on a declining track for many years. Therefore, the Palaszczuk government was prepared to take the hard decision to close these colleges as training entities and repurpose their very substantial facilities in Longreach and Emerald. The government's approach to repurposing these facilities has been highly consultative. Local consultative stakeholder committees were created in both Longreach and Emerald. These committees received over 20 proposals in each centre to the repurposing of these college assets and drew up short lists of proposals in each centre based on a set of principles developed by the committees themselves. The aim of the repurposing is to strengthen the education and training system both for agricultural industry and more generally in the regions, on a more sustainable basis than were Queensland agriculture colleges.

The other distinguishing feature of the government's approach is the application of the Palaszczuk government's job security policy. An employee assistance program assisted staff with their reskilling and job search needs. A voluntary redundancy package of up to 64 weeks pay, depending on length of service, was made available to permanent staff. It should be noted that this was purely voluntary; there were no compulsory retrenchments. I thank the committee for its consideration of this important bill. I commend the bill to the House.