




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT


Record of Proceedings, 5 February 2020

AGRICULTURE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMEMDMNT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (4.56 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Agriculture and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and I do so as chair of the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee. I thank the minister for his in-depth coverage of the many issues addressed by this bill, and I want to address three main issues in my contribution to this debate. Firstly, the amendments in this bill are very welcome because the biosecurity risks that we face are very real risks. The impact of biosecurity breaches can be devastating, and as we heard in the case of foot-and-mouth disease they can be catastrophic. We know that an outbreak across Australia could cost as much as \$52 billion over 10 years according to a 2013 study. Foot-and-mouth has already hit the UK in 2001 and 2007, China in 2007, and Japan and Korea in 2011. It is serious. It is viral. It is highly contagious.

African swine fever is harmless to humans, but it is simply deadly for pigs. There is no cure; there is no vaccine. If it gets into a herd, you can say goodbye to them because the only action you can take from there is pre-emptive slaughter. This disease has now been detected in East Timor, just off the north of Australia. As the minister said, Queensland has 22 per cent of the national herd and the gross value of our pork production is \$216 million. We cannot and we do not underestimate the economic devastation that would be visited on Queensland by an outbreak of one of these two diseases. As we have heard, the Queensland livestock industry is worth \$6 billion and employs over 60,000 Queenslanders. These diseases and other diseases like them can be spread very easily. All it takes is one speck of dirt on the soles of your shoes or in the tread of your tyres. That is why the amendments in this bill aimed at biosecurity are so important.

An important amendment in the bill is to the Biosecurity Act 2014 to allow the chief executive to amend a biosecurity zone map. Until now changes could only be made by amending a regulation through the Governor in Council. This new system will mean no delays. If a map needs to be re-zoned or amended for biosecurity, such as a fire ant map, it can be done almost straight away. Another important amendment to the Biosecurity Act 2014 is that a failure to comply with a biosecurity management plan will attract a far larger penalty. It will see an increase from 20 penalty units to 500 penalty units.

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (6.09 pm), continuing: Before the debate was adjourned I was talking about the importance of biosecurity management plans. The Palaszczuk government has already had good success in elevating the importance of biosecurity management plans. In April we brought in a new regulation that specified a new offence for not complying with a biosecurity management plan and on-the-spot fines. Since then there have been fewer incidents of errant trespassers coming onto land than in the past. Observing and obeying biosecurity management plans is for everyone, and that includes protesters. Those who breach these plans need to know the potential impact of what they are doing.

The second issue I want to cover is that of body worn cameras for officers in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Today we are amending the Biosecurity Act 2014 and other acts to enable these workers on the front line to carry out enforcement activities as part of their job. In our committee we have seen how these marvellous officers work protecting our agriculture industry and our natural resources. We have seen how the addition of new technology like these cameras makes them safer and more efficient at their job. They can turn on their camera and record everything when liaising with certain members of the public. Not only that, the camera helps stop the erroneous claims, perhaps, of suspects. The evidence gained can be used later to charge people.

I do not underestimate the potential dangers faced by these officers on the front line. I believe that some years ago in New South Wales an officer investigating illegal clearing was killed. Fisheries officers can be pretty isolated out there on the water. I believe they sometimes deal with people who are members of organised crime gangs. It is no wonder that sometimes they work in the field with police officers. Therefore, the addition of body worn cameras helps them take action against suspects, protects those being interviewed and keeps our officers safe.

The issue of body worn cameras has been highlighted by other speakers. I do not understand why the LNP appears reluctant to allow these departmental officers on the front line the best equipment to protect them. Like everyone on this side of the House, I am sure they do not want to see our officers understaffed and underequipped. These officers are administering justice. We do not want them facing suspects with one hand tied behind their backs. I know that there are many former police officers on both sides of the House. As someone who sits next to a former police officer, I know that they have and do use these body worn cameras to great effect.

The third issue I want to cover is that of dogs in hot cars. The bill's significant amendments mean fewer animals will suffer or die in hot cars. From now on, a person who inappropriately confines or transports an animal may be breaching their duty of care. No-one will argue against this. We know that a dog can die within minutes in a hot car, even in one with a window down. Last year, 829 animals were rescued from hot cars.

It is important to note as well that the Animal Welfare Advisory Board said that, although the LNP wants it, we do not need a new offence to deal with this issue. The board said that it was more appropriate to amend a current offence. On this issue, I refer to the amendments being dropped today without due consideration by the member for Gympie. In his first amendment to clause 4, the member for Gympie wants to prohibit a breach of duty of care. This will actually make the situation worse!

By omitting this section, a person could place a dog in a hot car and not face a penalty for breaching a duty of care. A dog would have to suffer first for the threshold of cruelty to be breached. By removing the breach of duty of care provisions, a dog has to suffer before the owner can be charged for cruelty. I believe that this is unacceptable. This is the kind of thing that we want to prevent through this legislation. I certainly caution members in terms of voting for these amendments.

In conclusion, this omnibus bill introduces many much needed amendments to ensure we can preserve and enhance our agricultural industries and look after our natural resources. I commend the bill to the House.