




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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AGRICULTURE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMEMDMENT BILL

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (6.43 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Agriculture and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Can I say at the outset that whilst I will not be opposing this bill in its entirety, I have some deep concerns regarding some of the provisions contained within it. Furthermore, I will be supporting the sensible and practical amendments moved by my colleague, the member for Gympie. Those opposite can talk this bill up all they like, but at the end of the day it falls a long way short of what is required when dealing with animal activists and unlawful trespass. I will speak shortly about the need for the amendments my colleague has moved, but firstly I would like to speak to the amendments relating to animal activists.

For context, in May last year this government increased the fines that apply to people trespassing on agricultural land to just over \$650. What an insult to Queensland's primary producers: \$650 for jeopardising Queensland's disease free status; \$650 for jeopardising a business that quite often is the result of generations of work; \$650 for causing Queensland families to 'live with the fear of people invading them, sneaking around in the night with masks.' Yet those opposite claim to support agriculture.

Then the minister has the audacity to come in here today and move an amendment to increase the relevant provision relating to unlawfully entering farming land to 20 penalty units. That is \$2,669. That still falls well short of being an effective deterrent. Let me put that into context: at the moment a bullock from a feedlot is worth in the vicinity of \$2,500. That means the maximum fine that these activists face is little more than the cost of one beast in a feedlot which may at any one time have 20,000 head—that is \$40 million of stock at any one time—and here we have a maximum fine of \$2,669.

The LNP supports legal protests conducted under the authority of a police permit. There is no question about that. We support opinions being shared in a respectful, constructive manner. What the LNP does not support is people trespassing and terrorising our hardworking farmers and businesses across this state. That is in stark contrast to this government's weak attempt to convince regional Queensland that it cares. Like those fines, this government's intention to double the penalty for unlawful entry on farming land is manifestly inadequate.

I will now move on to the important and sensible amendments moved by my colleague, the member for Gympie. Just like we have seen with its approach to trespassers, this government is soft on the vile people who are cruel to animals. Let us be clear on this as well for the benefit of those opposite: leaving an animal in a hot car is animal cruelty, baiting dogs is animal cruelty. It is time for this government to get serious instead of tinkering around the edges. The changes included in this bill are a tiny step towards treating these types of offences. In fact, one could be forgiven for thinking there is a theme to this bill and that theme appears to be ignoring animal welfare. This government has not just failed to protect animals from animal cruelty, it has also failed to protect animals on farms from the stress and possible disease that comes with trespass activities by these extreme activists.

As an omnibus bill there are many amendments included in this bill, but this brings with it the need for the minister to provide clarity on concerns that we on this side of the House, industry groups and interest groups have raised. Like my colleagues, I would like further information from the minister on what steps are being taken to ensure amendments to the Biosecurity Act will not have unintended consequences. I also ask that the minister outlines the interaction between this bill and the Human Rights Act 2019 which will commence this year.

As a former police officer, and given this government's willingness to circumvent the need for warrants when it comes to primary producers, my reservations to allow entry to premises without a warrant are well founded. However, in this case I do fully support empowering a properly appointed inspector to act without hindrance when an animal is at imminent risk of death or injury. I also support extending access to mediation for farmers who are facing issues relating to farm business debts. It is no secret that many Queensland farmers are facing challenges today and have been for some time. In addition to supporting that amendment, I also call on financial institutions to treat all primary producers with fairness and respect, particularly given the ongoing drought across the state.

Wild stock in state forests, timber reserves and forest entitlement areas do pose risks in terms of environmental degradation of land through grazing, damage to flora and may be hazardous to forest operations and road safety. I can personally attest to the impact that wild stock have in state forest areas. One only need look north of Townsville in the Bluewater area to understand the dangers that wild stock pose to residents and motorists on the Bruce Highway. Brumbies have caused a number of serious accidents in that area, including fatal traffic accidents along a notorious section of the highway around Bluewater. In the interests of public safety it is imperative that this stock is controlled and managed.

I will now turn to the amendments to be moved by the member for Gympie. Amendment 1 will align the offence of inappropriately confining or transporting animals with a cruelty offence under section 18 of the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001, with a \$250,000 maximum fine or a three-year maximum prison sentence. This will align the penalty associated with dog baiting with a cruelty offence penalty under section 18 of that act. Dog baiting is already prohibited under the act as a specific offence.

Amendment 2 will simply increase the penalties to align this with our publicly stated position. Amendment 2 will make the crime of baiting an animal a cruelty offence under section 18 of that act and carry a penalty of \$250,000 maximum fine. The LNP want to give Queensland pet owners certainty that if and when these perpetrators are apprehended they will face the full force of the law with tougher penalties, including larger fines and longer jail terms.

I will move on to the provisions within the bill relating to the traceability of goats. I can appreciate that traceability of livestock is critical in a biosecurity emergency as well as to enable market access. The Biosecurity Act 2014 currently exempts feral goats from having approved identification devices or tags before being moved in certain situations. However, the proposal to remove the tagging exemptions for goats is absolutely ludicrous. I note that AgForce does not support the changes to remove tagging exemptions for goats and I certainly support that position. I also note that the Goat Industry Council of Australia and the Australian Meat Industry Council also oppose the changes. Minister, I challenge you to climb—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Direct your comments through the chair please, member.

Mr LAST: I challenge the minister to climb into a double-decker truck with around 200 feral goats and tag them. I believe there would be a number of MPs in this place who would probably pay good money to see the minister undertake that task. I have no doubt it would prove very clearly to the minister the difficulties associated with putting tags on feral goats.

Finally, I move on to the amendments that will repeal the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges Act 2005, effectively winding up the Emerald and Longreach agricultural colleges. What a disgrace that this minister has chosen to tack these amendments onto this bill in an effort to drive them through this parliament. Make no mistake, this is a dark day for agriculture in this state. It sounds the final death knell for our agricultural colleges—colleges which have trained thousands of students to work in our agricultural sector. Rural and regional Queenslanders will not forget that it was under the minister's watch that these colleges closed. I certainly hope the funds from the sale of these assets are reinvested in rural Queensland and not funnelled into South-East Queensland to prop up some city project.

This is an omnibus bill that the LNP will not be opposing. However, there are some serious concerns with the provisions contained in the bill that I have addressed tonight. I have no doubt that there will be far-reaching ramifications as a result of the provisions contained in the minister's bill.