



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Quarantine
QUESTION

Tuesday, 11 March 2008

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

QUESTION

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Questioner Turnour, Jim, MP
Speaker

Source House
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Responder Burke, Tony, MP
Question No.

Quarantine

Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (4.15 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Can the minister inform the House of the latest—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The continuation of question time was identified by the member for Warringah—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. I know what is going on here. It is a try-on because of an incident in the last sitting fortnight, in completely different circumstances, where people were still resuming their seats. If the member for North Sydney were to have taken a full picture of the chamber he would have seen that the member for Leichhardt was standing on his lonesome in his place at the same time that the honourable member for Warringah was attempting to get the call. There is a limit to the amount of nonsense that I will take—there is a limit.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, If you call that nonsense—

The SPEAKER—I am calling it something which I believe it to be: deliberately disruptive.

Mr Hockey—It is not deliberately disruptive. It is about the standards of the House.

The SPEAKER—That is exactly the point that I am making. The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. In the other example I gave a full explanation of what happened. The member for North Sydney might claim that there was some confusion, but the member who did not seek the call could have done something to make sure that that confusion was not the same. In this case, when people were resuming their places, I could have quite easily given the call to the member for Leichhardt straight away because members were on their feet running around. I am really trying to get the chamber to a point where there is a bit of respect shown to everybody—and, in fairness, I have tried to do the right thing in rotating the call. As I have said to the member for North Sydney privately—and I do not wish to embarrass the member for Wentworth—I wish the member for Wentworth had not dropped the two inches on that occasion. Then this would not be a point. The member for Leichhardt has the call.

Mr TURNOUR—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Can the minister inform the House of the latest developments in quarantine?

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry)—Shortly before question time today I was advised of a certification error by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service which may have a significant impact on the beef industry in New Caledonia. AQIS has advised that, under the previous government, on 23 November last year cattle were exported to New Caledonia from Australia that were vaccinated against the disease babesiosis instead of being treated with a chemical treatment, as required by New Caledonia's import requirements. Animals vaccinated against babesiosis can be a source of infection to ticks. I am advised that the export of vaccinated cattle to New Caledonia has allowed the disease to enter their tick population and has caused a disease outbreak in their local cattle.

While information on this issue is still coming to hand, it seems clear first of all that there was a certification error by AQIS and that, as a result of that error, there may be a significant impact on the beef industry in New Caledonia. On hearing this information prior to question time I immediately held a telephone conference with the secretary of my department, who is also the Director of Quarantine, and I am urgently seeking more information, including what assistance measures can be provided to New Caledonia. I hope to meet with their ambassador later today. I understand that AQIS is seeking expert advice from the Queensland Tick Fever Centre on ways to manage the exported cattle and cattle which have been in contact with the exported animals in New Caledonia.

Preliminary advice is that treating all the cattle—those exported from Australia and the New Caledonian cattle in contact with them—by injecting them with the chemical Imazol would kill the organism in the cattle and prevent further transmission of the disease to ticks. I understand that AQIS is also seeking advice on how to ensure that the disease is eradicated from the New Caledonian tick population. I also took the opportunity during the last hour to speak with Russell Bock from the Queensland Tick Fever Centre. He has confirmed that the centre is willing to assist the New Caledonian authorities in whatever way it can to help them deal with the outbreak, including with serological testing. Russell Bock told me that in order for them to be able to receive the samples they will require cooperation from AQIS. I have received an email in the last couple of minutes from the Director of Quarantine and the secretary of my department confirming that AQIS will expedite the import permits for samples from New Caledonia to be sent to Australia for serological analysis by the Queensland Tick Fever Centre. Members will already be aware that I announced a review into Australia's—

Mr Hockey—Is this a ministerial statement?

Mr BURKE—This is important information about a major impact on the beef industry in New Caledonia. Members will be aware that I previously announced a review by Mr Roger Beale AO into Australia's quarantine services. It is critically important both for the protection of biosecurity in Australia and for our neighbouring countries to which we provide a service under agreed protocols that our quarantine and biosecurity services are robust. This review will help inform that process. We are also making sure that we meet all our obligations with respect to the government of New Caledonia.

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.