PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

DEPARTMENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY

STATES AND NORTHERN TERRITORY GRANTS (BLUETONGUE VIRUS CONTROL) BILL 1978

Date Introduced: 31 May 1978
House: House of Representatives
Presented by: Rt. Hon. I.M. Sinclair, M.P., Minister for Primary Industry

Purpose

To provide matching Commonwealth financial assistance to the States and the Northern Territory for expenditure on the control of bluetongue virus and on virology laboratory equipment.

Provisions

This Bill will provide for the Commonwealth to make arrangements with the States for the provisions of payments by the States for bluetongue control purposes (paragraphs 4(1)(a) and 4(1)(b)) and for expenditure on virology laboratory equipment (paragraph 4(1)(c)). The Commonwealth will share equally with the States the cost of financing such measures by reimbursing the States one-half of any such expenditures by the States (clause 5). Assistance for bluetongue control purposes is to be paid to cattle producers, for mustering cattle (in the control of bluetongue and for stock movement) in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory between 1 January 1978 and 31 December 1978 and also for bloodtesting cattle (in the control of bluetongue) in any State and the Northern Territory between 1 October 1977 and 31 December 1978. Clauses 9 to 12 provide financial arrangements for payment of the grants including authorisation to borrow, appropriations of CRF and the Loan Fund and transfer from the Loan Fund to CRF of amounts paid from CRF.

Under this legislation, the Northern Territory is to be treated as a State from 1 July 1978 (sub-clause 3(2)) in that it will share equally with the Commonwealth the financing of assistance provided in the N.T. (clause 5) from that date (sub-clause 4(2)).

Background

According to the Second Reading Speech, the Commonwealth has made proposals to the States and the N.T. for assistance to be provided for mustering, to be at the rate of $3 per head up to a maximum of $3,000 per property and secondly, for bloodtesting, to be
at the rate of $5 per head for survey and surveillance bloodtesting and $10 per head for movement testing. Thirdly, proposals have included the provision of funds for virology laboratory equipment of up to $100,000 in the N.T., up to $75,000 in Queensland and up to $50,000 in Western Australia. The total cost of the three types of assistance is estimated to be $3.768m., with the Commonwealth's share estimated at $2.426m. It is proposed that the scheme be administered by the States and the N.T.

The bluetongue virus in cattle is not usually serious but it can be a very serious disease in sheep. However, there is no scientific evidence that the virus can be transmitted in meat or other livestock products.

The Minister for Primary Industry announced on 28 October 1977, that a virus similar to bluetongue had been isolated from a midge collection made near Darwin in March 1975. On 13 November 1977, the Minister stated that the virus isolated from the Northern Territory insects by a laboratory in the USA had been confirmed by the World Reference Laboratory in (Onderstepoort) South Africa, to be a strain of bluetongue, previously unrecorded. The strain is very mild in character.

No presence of the bluetongue disease in any livestock in Australia is in any way evident. In addition, the virus has not been isolated from (and hence there is no virological or clinical evidence of its presence) any livestock in Australia. Furthermore, serological (blood) tests show no evidence of past infection or exposure to the virus in sheep, anywhere in Australia, or in cattle in southern Australia. However, such tests have proved positive for cattle in northern Australia (near Darwin and in isolated parts of northern Queensland) and N.T. buffalo in south-eastern Queensland.

Controls and restrictions were placed on the movement of stock from northern Australia following the confirmation of the presence of the virus. Many overseas countries also banned or restricted their imports of some livestock and livestock products from Australia, although many of these restraints have now been lifted following technical representation by Australian authorities.

On 26 May 1978, the Minister announced that serological tests of animals in NSW have suggested their past exposure to a second type of bluetongue virus. However, this strain has not been isolated from either insects or animals.