



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 10 May 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 10 May 2012
Page 4626
Questioner
Speaker Cobb, John, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (10:00): I rise to speak on the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012. As time moves on, acts always need to be tidied up, amended, and basically that is what this bill is about. It is about efficiencies, and it is good to see that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has produced a bill that actually reflects, more or less, the wishes of the agriculture industry. It is a bill that the industry pushed for with the future in mind. The industry is working towards facilitating a conducive environment in which agriculture can prosper. In this case, the department has acquiesced, as indeed it should. In saying this, the coalition does support the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012.

This bill will make minor amendments to eight portfolio acts to improve the operation of existing legislation and make technical amendments. I am pleased that the proposed changes are aimed at reducing red tape, complexity and unnecessary regulation that for too long have clogged up the system, even though the modifications seem minor in nature. I would have to say, though, that under this government the agriculture sector and most sectors have become more restrictive environments due to red and, in particular, green tape.

But amendments to the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980 are welcome. To ensure accurate record keeping and effective auditing, labels have to provide truthful claims relating to the product. However, industry groups have raised concerns regarding labelling laws, which have become onerous and confusing. The proposed amendments would reduce the onerous record-keeping requirements of people who supply or receive wine goods that are packaged for sale to a consumer.

The industry approached the department seeking these changes. The most important role of the department of agriculture is to facilitate an environment which allows farmers and the industry to get on with the job and provide an environment where agriculture can prosper. We are talking about practical measures that maintain the integrity of the wine industry and associated programs.

Further changes to the definition of 'vintage' have also been welcomed. A vintage year at present is from the period 1 July to 30 June the following year; however, harvest normally occurs from the late summer, finishing before 30 June. Some producers make wines from grapes harvested after 30 June but before 1 September. Common sense will now see more accurate labelling of these late-harvested products. A vintage year will now be considered to be the period of 1 September to 31 August.

Amendments to the Fisheries Management Act 1991 are also sensible, moderate reductions in regulations to simplify and improve the administration of the fisheries.

Changes to the Primary Industries Levies and Charges Collection Act 1991 allow the departmental secretary to consider all requests made by levy payers for the remission of penalties. It is amazing to think that penalties might be late in being paid. This delegation of responsibility to the departmental secretary will improve the efficiency and, one would hope, the speed of the penalty provisions process while, importantly, still allowing unsatisfied levy payers to seek a review from the minister.

A number of technical amendments will also be made to a number of other pieces of legislation, which allow for the correcting of errors and other issues which reduce confusion and deliver more clearly the original intent of the acts being amended. These would often be delivered through a statute law revision bill and would probably have passed through the house without debate at a later stage. However, due to the timing of the above amendments, we agree that it makes sense to combine these technical amendments so that the bills could be amended earlier.

The coalition supports these amendments as well as the repealing of the States Grants (War Service Land Settlement) Act 1952, which is now redundant. This was a great act—a historic act, actually—which helped returned war veterans repatriated after the war. Although there are still a few of the original returned servicemen

operating under this act, by agreement with the relevant states those states have taken over responsibility for any continuing lease arrangements.

For too long, I have to say, there have been an increasing number of Green and environmental activist agendas under this government. Despite that, when the department sets its mind to it, it can actually deal with the industry and come up with changes which are in everybody's interest: they are more efficient and they get things happening. Certainly, I believe, this bill is one of those very few put forward by this government that actually see the department consulting and listening to industry and putting words into action. There have been massive increases in red tape and business costs under this government, and there are about to be a heck of a lot more from 1 July. But I have to say that these sorts of efficiency changes do not cost much and they are needed. They have to be done when you consider that the Prime Minister had the gall to say just a few days ago how our agriculture can respond to the needs of Asia, when at the same time they put a blight on the cattle industry and are going to severely limit the ability of the irrigation industry to provide for that same sector of our customers and bring a carbon tax on. I truly believe that, if you take away with one hand, you cannot give it back just by standing up in the public arena and saying how agriculture will deliver. The Prime Minister is probably right: agriculture most certainly will deliver, but it will be despite her government, not because of it. I find it pretty galling that, with the actions they have taken regarding the agriculture sector, she can stand up and skite about what they will do for Asia. They will do that despite her government, not because of.