



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**BILLS**

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013**

**Consideration in Detail**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 30 May 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 30 May 2012  
**Page** 6404  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Burke, Tony, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr BURKE** (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (12:37): I thank the member for Calare for the question and also want to acknowledge the goodwill inherent in the way in which the question was asked. Every member of this parliament can stand proudly and say that Australia provides the safest and best quality beef in the world. The information which I have to provide in response to the question, I think, simply gives credence to exactly how careful we are with our health standards and how seriously we take them.

The department received notification from United States authorities that ground beef in the United States had tested positive for *E. coli*, and that Australian beef had been implicated in the detection. It is important to note that the Australian product had been found negative when it went through the Australian *E. coli* testing program prior to export. The implicated Australian product also complied with the relevant US testing program and met their import requirements when it was met at the border. So, it had been found to be safe when it left Australia and it was still found to be safe when it arrived in the United States.

Discussions are going on with all parties concerned, while confirmation as to what exactly is the source of the contamination is being progressed. Notwithstanding that, a voluntary recall of the relevant product is occurring in the United States. Australia has a strong reputation as a reliable, high-quality exporter. That reputation is underpinned by our world-class biosecurity system. We are committed to securing that reputation; so much so that we have invested \$524 million towards our biosecurity system in this year's budget. That investment will see more than \$1.6 billion invested in biosecurity by the government since 2009.

We have high-quality export standards and we expect those to be met. We have strong systems in place to detect and identify breaches if they occur. They are taken seriously and are traced all the way back to the point of origin, and corrective action is taken. We have a strong relationship with the United States on many fronts, and trade is one of those. But I think it is important in response to the question from the member for Calare to take away three points. The first is that when the beef left Australia it was properly tested and no *E. coli* was present. The second is that when it arrived in the United States, it was properly tested and found, once again, not to possess *E. coli*. Notwithstanding that, the moment there was ground beef that tested positive and Australian beef was implicated within that detection, we were immediately involved in a voluntary recall of the product while discussions continued to determine precisely what the actual source of the contamination is.