



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

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Questioner
Speaker Burke, Tony, MP

Source House
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Responder
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Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (12:42): I thank the member for McEwen for asking the question. I understand the new facility is located within his electorate—

Mr Mitchell: I don't think it's been formally—

Mr BURKE: We are not there yet? Okay. Let me go through, first of all, why we are in a conversation about a new facility at all, because it is really important for the House to be in no doubt.

Under the Howard government, the facilities which were owned by the government were all sold off. What then happened was that the standards under which the facilities were operating once the leaseback arrangements happened slipped further and further and further. By the time we came to office, the first job that I had to do in this portfolio was to be involved in the most substantial disease eradication program that Australia has ever had to engage in.

Let us not forget how far down the chain businesses were wrecked because of the quarantine standards that fell apart under the Howard government. Equine influenza caused massive damage—absolute carnage—and not just to the industries involved in the breeding of horses. If you are involved in a stud and you cannot move horses around, your business is over for that period of time. The money that you make is just gone. We had those careers and those businesses facing massive jeopardy.

However, when there was an end to the racing meets, which would subsequently occur, there was a massive impact on regional economies as well. And I am not simply saying: 'It is the big-money horses and the big-money breeders and trainers who might be at risk.' From the businesses that were meant to make their money selling the food at the shops, right through to every add-on business that relies on these race meets—which become so much of the core of the social and economic fabric of a regional community—it was just over. It was over and it could not take place. That saw this government having to oversee something which very rarely happens in Australia—that is, not simply a containment of a disease but a complete eradication of disease. Look around the world at the different examples of when a disease arrives. Find other nations that have had equine influenza arrive and have not just said, 'We've got it now; we'll put up with it.' Find other nations that have done that. If you want to find a place in the world that says, 'No, we will oversee right to the end a complete eradication of a disease,' it is Australia. That is exactly the problem that fell to this government and which we delivered on.

On that basis, how do we undo the extraordinary damage that was done by the wheels falling off our quarantine system under the Howard government? What that meant was that, in the first instance, the damage caused by not having proper systems in place needed to be fixed. That is why it has fallen to the current Minister for Agriculture to have to go to the budget process and see a significant increase in the injection of extra biosecurity dollars. When you have savings in biosecurity—the cuts to systems, the falling apart of processes and the abandonment of the quarantine facilities which we saw under the Howard government—you are not just putting the horse industry at risk but also creating a risk that goes through anybody who is involved in primary production throughout Australia.

With all the damage that happened with equine influenza, imagine if it was foot-and-mouth-disease that had slipped through. Imagine the carnage that would have taken place in primary industries across this entire country. The time has come to rebuild the mess we were left with. The work has already been done in terms of getting proper processes back into our quarantine systems, and that has been going apace. We need to have a proper structure instead of the system which had started to fall apart at Eastern Creek. That was all revealed in black and white through the Callinan inquiry and the system is now being rebuilt under this government.

There is \$524.2 million in the budget for biosecurity, which includes \$379.9 million for a new state-of-the-art biosecurity facility in Melbourne, which will be constructed over seven years. Funding for the purchase of land

for the facility was in last year's budget. The facility is required because of the short-sighted decisions of the previous government. All they saw in an outpost entry quarantine facilities was something to sell. (*Time expired*)