



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
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Questioner
Speaker Burke, Tony, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (16:10): I will answer on the different issues with the best information that I have, and being mindful of the constraints on time in the House. But I thank the member for Calare for the issues he has raised.

In terms of the quarantine centre in Melbourne, let us face it: there were massive problems in the systems that we saw when equine influenza took off around the eastern side of this nation—massive problems in the system being properly managed across a large number of different centres. We saw that. Now if you streamline that into one centre, you have a centre that is properly managed, properly focused on and better resourced. Then you should have a way of avoiding a whole lot of the challenges that we ended up seeing, in particular coming through at Eastern Creek.

As to the concept of a quarantine centre being contaminated, the whole concept of a quarantine centre is that it is quarantined. That is where you keep things. By definition, in a quarantine centre there will often be pests and diseases; the problem, when the coalition were in government, was that they did not stay within the quarantine centre. Having equine influenza within a quarantine centre would have been one thing; the problem was that systems, and a lack of systems, meant it got spread all the way around the country. That is the problem that has been dealt with. That is why we had the Callinan inquiry. That is why, from opposition, we announced the full-ranging review that became the Beale review. And that is why we are now in a situation of significantly reforming the number of sites; we go to one. And do not forget: when we had more sites, not only was the management bad but the Howard government had chosen to sell them off. That is why they are not owned by the Commonwealth.

On the quarantine centre for excellence: we are talking about something where you are dealing with actual construction. The processes that will have to be gone through with the Department of Finance and Deregulation do have a degree of caution. That means the money does not go out the door as quickly as it would otherwise. But that level of caution in those processes and the different things that have to be gone through with Finance I think certainly amounts to good policy.

On the demand for automatic reprocessing for the APVMA: we are committed to a system of reregistration for agricultural and veterinary chemicals. This will assure the community that chemicals currently being used in Australia meet contemporary health and safety standards. We do not want to have a situation where something is approved on scientific information and evidence that becomes deeply old and is never looked at again.

There is a reason why we have an independent approvals authority. We have it for people's safety. We have it for the safety of farmers who are using the chemicals. We have it for the safety of people eating the food that is produced. And we make no apology for that—absolutely no apology. The fact that that gets looked at again in the future is something which is a decision the government took after we had received over 70 submissions on the draft legislation and after over 150 stakeholders attended consultation meetings. We do end up with a situation where the level of caution for Australians, for the environment, for people, is a higher level of caution than if once a chemical is registered you never look at it again. That does mean there is extra compliance that gets done and, as a result of that, we have a safer system. The government makes no apology for those decisions.

Mr John Cobb: Cocos Island?

Mr BURKE: On that, the information is not in front of us. If that comes to me then I will provide the information to the member.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Infrastructure and Transport Portfolio

Proposed expenditure, \$588,568,000