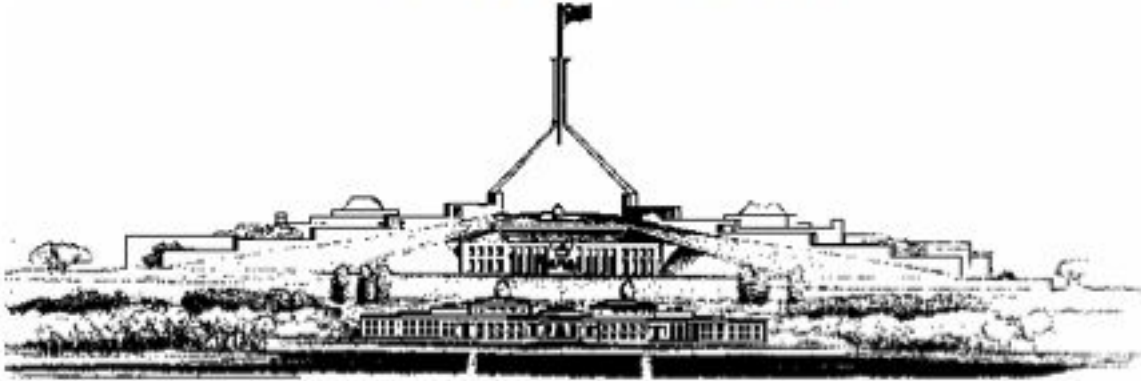




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

Farrer Electorate: Henty Machinery Field Days

SPEECH

Thursday, 22 September 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Ley, Sussan, MP

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Ms LEY (Farrer) (12:40): Today as well as on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week saw the Henty field days in my electorate of Farrer at the town of Henty. It is the first Henty field days I have not been able to attend, because of parliament sitting on those three days, but I am talking to the team of people there and finding out the issues that are being discussed. We have a 'no carbon tax' petition at the front of our site. I just spoke to the member of my staff who is managing the process who said, 'I can't believe the anger in the people that are coming up to sign this petition, and by the end of our three days here we will have hundreds of pages.' To be honest, I did not expect that response. I thought that people wandering by to chat about the season or the conditions or the mice and rabbits or the fact that we need another five to 10 millimetres of rain would probably see the carbon tax petition and say, 'Okay, sure, I'll sign it.' In fact, that is not the case. They are queuing up to sign it. This is the petition that says that the Australian people should have their say on whether we have a carbon tax.

I wanted to mention that because it genuinely is something that is happening at the Henty fields days this year, but I also want to talk about mice and rabbits. Earlier this week a constituent of mine from the far west of New South Wales, David Lord, came to Canberra to address the backbench coalition group on rural industries and he spoke about the real need for Australia to develop new biological control options for rabbits. Those of us who have looked at the history of pests in Australia possibly remember a book called *They a ll r an wild*, which details the scary results from rabbits across Australia. We asked David Lord, who brought a colleague with him—who I think is connected with the CSIRO but in any case is in some research capacity—why rabbits have slipped below the radar. The answer was that they are just not sexy or particularly interesting. The government has given \$20 million to camel control, and I think it is too wet to actually carry that out, but \$1.2 million to rabbit control. It is just not enough. Now is the time to begin the search for the next biological control for the rabbit. It really is getting too late.

The two really successful controls we have had are myxomatosis and calicivirus. But because the rabbit populations are building up so much in the far west following recent good rain, it is obvious that those controls are no longer working. We need science, we need applied research and we need a laboratory to make this happen. There is not the ability in the wide-open station country of the far west to go out and rip rabbit burrows, which is what a lot of us who have been farmers in the past have done, and physically fill in rabbit burrows. Putting Phostoxin tablets down and shovelling them over was a painstaking task, but often the only way you could get rid of rabbits.

I also want to mention mice because, while their numbers have eased off at the moment, if we get a little bit of rainfall and the weather warms up there is the potential for mice populations to absolutely explode. Unfortunately, we have seen the shutting down of baiting stations during the middle of a mice plague. I think this is symptomatic of our current agriculture minister's inability to get on the front foot with this stuff. I know there is an arms-length process that goes through the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority and I understand that process well because I was the parliamentary secretary responsible for the authority. They do a good job, but they are moving at glacial pace. They are looking at possibly extending permits and gathering information and talking to a national mouse management working group. I want to bring the frustration of farmers to the attention of this place. Farmers see this process that is happening but they just want to get hold of mouse bait and store it on farm ready for when mouse numbers increase. Unfortunately, what they are doing is mixing their own brews at home, using chemicals that probably are not allowed to be used in the way that they are using them. I am not condoning that of course, but when mouse bait is not available they may use unorthodox approaches. Anyone who has lived through a mouse plague in rural Australia knows there is nothing funny about it. I can tell you that it sends people crazy if they get in the house. It literally destroys and devastates crops. I urge the minister to step in and take action.