

## BIOSECURITY COST RECOVERY – 9 November 2011

**Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:29):** I move:

That this house instruct the Environment, Resources and Development Committee to fully investigate and report on the cost recovery policy in the form of a proposed biosecurity fee as it affects livestock owners, and in particular—

- (a) a comparison of the services to be provided by the proposed biosecurity fee with those of the commonwealth government's biosecurity program;
- (b) a review of the proposed cost share formula as it affects different species;
- (c) the consideration of the appropriateness of the exemptions criteria (species types and number of animals kept); and
- (d) any other relevant matter.

I rise to speak on this proposed introduction of this amendment to the Livestock Act with regard to the animal health and biosecurity fee which has been flagged by the Labor government and Primary Industries and Resources of South Australia—perhaps I should be calling it Primary Industries in the Regions, South Australia. I wonder how much forestry was pulped to change the letterhead, but that is another story. The proposal to place another fee on farming communities has caused great concern amongst industry groups. As I have said many times in this house, and in many places since last year's budget, primary industries has been hit by an \$80 million cut to its budget, the loss of around 300 staff, the loss of research programs and the loss of research facilities. It is just disgusting the way this government treats primary industries in this state. As I have said before, it is an industry that has provided \$4.7 billion to this state's economy in the last year.

I would like to talk about some of the issues that may happen if this fee is introduced. I want to go back to the industry groups which are part of the industry advisory taskforce to the government. They hesitantly accepted the property identification code fees. They believed that getting people to register their properties for a cost of \$38 a year was a way to help with biosecurity. I do not think that the way in which it was introduced was a smart move, knowing that there was another fee and proposal coming over the top, which will not be as easy for the government to introduce because it means that there will need to be a change of legislation for the government to get it up.

For example, the dairy industry already provides fees to Animal Health Australia, Meat and Livestock Australia, Dairy Australia, and the dairy authority levy, so there are multiple levies already paid just from that group. We look at cattle levies that are supported through primary industries funding schemes—and these are across multiple sectors in primary industries—including a 65¢ cattle levy on the national livestock identification system tags. Primary industries wants to push that cost to \$2. We are already well aware that major station and stock owners want to exit that scheme. That is a voluntary scheme: you pay the levy and you can ask for your levy fees back. That will create a major risk to a budgetary line, because those funds that have been going in as part of biosecurity will not be there.

As I indicated, before this fee is introduced, \$860,000 is being raised through property identification codes, and \$3.14 million to be recovered by 2014-15 under this proposed biosecurity fee. Through different cattle and sheep industry funds, \$2.34 million has already been raised.

In a briefing that PIRSA presented to the Liberal Party, this proposal put up by the government looks at the controlled notifiable conditions, the offence categories, the advisory groups, the expiation fees, and the role of artificial breeding procedures. Initiatives include term of registration and renewal, identification codes, expanding movement restrictions, control or eradication of disease procedures, recovery of costs for inspectors, and the Exotic Diseases Eradication Fund.

The combined budget target of the PIC fee and the proposed biosecurity fee is \$4.1 million by 2014-15, and the revenue from PIC was just under \$1 million. Under this program, primary industries is looking at full cost recovery for endemic disease programs under the primary industry funding schemes of \$1.7 million. It is looking at recovery of \$1.41 million for the exotic diseases program by 2014-15. As part of that, that is what the biosecurity fee will collect.

In the proposal, properties with fewer than 10 animals, 100 chickens or 10 beehives will not be required to pay a biosecurity fee, and there is a sector allocation of how much each sector will provide. If this is introduced, the average cost per property and its impact on our primary producers in

this state by 2014-15 will be: for sheep owners, \$72; cattle, \$98; pigs, \$695; poultry, \$900 (so you are damned if you grow chooks and eggs); horses, \$125; deer, alpacas and goats, \$144; and bees, \$154. This is just another levy that this government wants to bleed out of primary producers.

I want to talk about an issue brought to me by one of my constituents on how Primary Industries and Resources South Australia is failing in regard to its biosecurity activity. An email I received in September states:

I wish to communicate my concerns over the proposed Animal Health Biosecurity Fee, which is being proposed as a means of partially recovering the cost of providing services such as disease surveillance. The fee will be imposed on livestock producers in SA who benefit from Biosecurity SA's Animal Health programme. As the owners of more than 10 horses, we will be required to pay the fee, but I do not believe that horse owners do, or will, benefit.

I recently had cause to deal with PIRSA after six of our horses developed severe neurological symptoms. The eventual outcome was, of eight horses on the property, one was found dead without warning, subsequently five developed neurological symptoms, two recovered and three more died.

I am in Adelaide, but our horses live...on the Eyre Peninsula with my daughter and son-in-law. I only became involved with PIRSA when my daughter, rang me in tears of desperation. She was at the stables with the horses, one of whom was clearly not going to survive for much longer, trying unsuccessfully to contact PIRSA using her mobile phone. The reason for her doing so was in order to comply with Section 27 of the Livestock Act 1997 which requires any owner to report, among other things, any incidence of unusual nervous signs in their livestock. She had spoken to PIRSA a few days earlier when the first symptoms were observed, and her call was transferred to the Animal Health Inspector at Port Augusta, who advised that he would arrange for sample pots and formaldehyde to be sent to her in the event of the death of another horse. Vacutainers for blood samples were also dispatched.

I advised that I would do what I could from Adelaide and first rang the 24/7 emergency hotline. This rang out. I then rang PIRSA Head Office, after explaining to the person (possibly the Receptionist) who answered my call why I was ringing, my call was forwarded through three people and eventually back to the person who answered my call, who cut me off. Unfortunately I did not take note of the names of any of the people I spoke to.

I then telephoned the office of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. After explaining the situation I was advised that someone from the office would contact PIRSA and ensure that an appropriate person contacted my daughter. This they did, but first demanded to know why she had contacted the office of the minister.

A Horse Industry Update from Biosecurity SA dated 30/05/2011 states:

Horse owners should contact their local veterinarian if their horse is unwell. The vet can then work with Biosecurity SA to undertake a disease investigation on cases with neurological signs.

A further document (The Animal Health Biosecurity Feed, Some Frequently Asked Questions and answers) states that the animal health program run by Biosecurity SA 'maintains a regional network of highly trained veterinarians and animal health officers, providing support for producers and private veterinarians and investigation of unusual livestock diseases.'

None of this support was offered to us. In fact, a request from the animal health inspector at Port Augusta for post mortem brain and major organ samples for analysis was fulfilled by the local butcher, who is not experienced in equine autopsy.

**Mr van Holst Pellekaan:** Good butchers in Port Augusta.

**Mr PEDERICK:** Absolutely; they will cut up anything.

*Members interjecting:*

**Mr PEDERICK:** That's no offence to the butchers; they are good butchers. The letter continued:

These samples were required for viral analysis, and despite the fact that our horses could, possibly, have been suffering from a disease that could have been infectious to humans, and that brain and spinal fluid pose high risk of cross-infection, no advice was given on personal protective equipment, safety procedures to follow, or decontamination protocols. PIRSA were later quoted in the media as stating that they did not fear a biosecurity risk or advise quarantine. I believe this to have been an entirely irresponsible statement since, at the time, all they knew for certain was that five horses on one property had developed serious neurological symptoms of unknown cause within the space of one week, and that four horses were dead.

After finally making contact with PIRSA, my daughter felt that she and the situation were not being taken seriously, and that PIRSA were demonstrating no intention of sending anyone qualified to investigate. As a final effort, [my daughter] asked whether the government vet she was speaking to had a mobile number to which [she] could forward video footage and photographs of the horses. Previously that day it had taken numerous attempts to even gain a response, but within three minutes—

three minutes, Madam Speaker—

of the footage being sent [my daughter] had a return call from the vet and assurances that a vet would be in attendance either that night, or the following day, to perform the second autopsy. While in attendance the vet performed medical

checks on two of the three affected horses who were still alive, and collected blood samples from four of the five remaining horses on the property. Samples were not collected from the fifth horse because the vet did not feel safe taking samples from her due to behavioural issues.

The fourth horse died a week later, and the stock inspector from Port Augusta travelled to Minnipa that night after extensive persuasion from [my daughter] to the PIRSA employee who answered her call. [My daughter] was advised that 'employees did not have to answer their phones on the weekend' and that there may not be anyone available to perform the post-mortem. Hardly a 24/7 service.

[My daughter] was also advised by PIRSA employees that:

'You fell through the gaps,' 'PIRSA is not set up to deal with horses,' 'PIRSA relies on private vets to perform investigations,' 'If you were located in the South-East it would be different, as there would be private vets close by to attend.'

I believe that, before imposing a fee on horse owners to recoup some of the cost of a program that is already established, PIRSA should look closely at how the program is being run. My experience was that the only PIRSA employees I could reach by telephone were unprofessional, totally lacking in a sense of accountability, and demonstrated no understanding at all of the possible outcome of the fatal condition our horses suffered, which could have been a highly contagious, exotic, zoonotic disease.

When [my daughter] was able to speak to a PIRSA vet she clearly described the symptoms and conditions of the horses, yet was dismissed until the vet observed the horses via video footage, at which point the seriousness of the situation was finally perceived and action taken. Hardly an active approach to disease surveillance, and certainly a contradiction to the statement below, made in the document 'The Animal Health Biosecurity Feed, Some Frequently Asked Questions and answers':

Knowing that there is this team available to advise, analyse, investigate and respond to specific threat to South Australian livestock and producers' profitability.

That is the end of the letter from that constituent. I think that sums up the regard of a lot of primary producers and horse owners in this state who are absolutely appalled about how they are treated, how they are being slugged for more and more fees and getting not no service but far less than acceptable service, especially with regard to what could have been an outbreak of a notifiable disease.

I commend this motion to the house. I want the house to have a good look at this, because all we have here is Primary Industries trying to hit farmers and animal growers for fees without providing any service. It is just a budgetary measure and another hit that a city-centric Labor government places on rural South Australia.