



## Stock Diseases Amendment (False Information) Bill.

### Second Reading

**Mr NEVILLE NEWELL** (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.23 a.m.], on behalf of Mr David Campbell: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Stock Diseases Act is the principal vehicle for protecting the health of farm animals in New South Wales. It is designed to help control and/or eradicate the spreading of stock diseases. The successful control of stock diseases is vital for a range of reasons, including animal welfare, environmental sustainability, regional and rural development and human health. The Stock Diseases Act is a crucial tool in protecting the future and reputation of our agricultural industries. Take, for example, the impact of ovine Johne's disease [OJD] on Australia's multibillion-dollar sheep industry.

Since being first detected on the Central Tablelands in 1980, OJD has become a major industry issue—particularly in New South Wales, which has, unfortunately, been the most affected State. In January 2003 there were nearly 1,200 flocks in New South Wales with confirmed OJD. A six-year, \$40-million national program was set up to provide a co-ordinated approach to dealing with OJD. Honourable members may know that the National Ovine Johne's Disease Control and Evaluation Program is set to conclude at the end of June 2004. This timing has given New South Wales producers and the State Government an opportunity to step back, re-examine the issue and consider the most effective way to manage OJD in the future.

This evaluation process has been difficult and, at times, divisive. But industry groups and the Government have worked together to develop a new approach to OJD management, which the New South Wales Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, outlined in September last year. The new OJD management approach is based on a risk-based trading system with a credit scheme to help improve information about disease risk. The changes that are the subject of this bill are a direct result of an independent review, the Bull review, which considered the ovine Johne's disease program in 2003.

A key recommendation was for the introduction of mandatory animal health statements for all sheep traded or agisted in New South Wales. These statements will provide crucial information to sheep buyers on a flock's OJD status. They will help producers make a more informed decision about the risks of animal disease. Under the Act it is already an offence for a person to make false or misleading statements about disease, and the risk of disease in livestock, in connection with the sale or disposal of livestock. However, producers can also suffer stock losses due to animal disease if areas of land have been contaminated by previous flocks. For example, livestock may have been leased to a livestock grazer, or stock may have been accepted on an agistment basis.

In order to help deter vendors from providing inaccurate information on animal disease status and risk, we need to have appropriate penalties in place for those who deliberately mislead others on these issues. The proposed amendments relate to the penalties for providing false and misleading statements in connection with the sale or agistment of livestock in New South Wales. They will bring those penalties into line with those in other States. It will also bring them into line with similar penalties relating to the sale of other goods in New South Wales. Stronger penalties will be matched with an information campaign to ensure that all sectors of the livestock industry are aware of the changes. This bill shows the Government's commitment to supporting primary producers in their attempts to self-regulate disease control in New South Wales, particularly ovine Johne's disease. I commend the bill to the House.

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