

**VETERINARY PRACTICE AMENDMENT (INTERSTATE VETERINARY
PRACTITIONERS) BILL 2011**

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Bill introduced on motion by Ms Katrina Hodgkinson.

Agreement in Principle

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck—Minister for Primary Industries, and Minister for Small Business) [11.30 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011 will amend the Veterinary Practice Act 2003 to implement the national recognition of veterinary registration [NRVR] model in New South Wales. This will simplify requirements for the registration of interstate vets in New South Wales and it has the potential to attract more of the estimated 6,000 vets who currently are not registered here by offering a reduction in costs and red tape. Each Australian State and Territory has its own legislation covering veterinary practice, which is administered by a veterinary board in each jurisdiction. In New South Wales it is the Veterinary Practitioners Board.

All the boards require equivalent veterinary qualifications and practical experience for registration of vets. This provides for a single, uniform national standard. However, at present, if vets wish to work in more than one State they must obtain separate registration in each jurisdiction in which they intend to practise. That creates an unnecessary administrative burden for governments and additional costs for an increasingly mobile workforce. It can also cause delays in responding to animal disease emergencies because, at present, interstate vets must be registered in New South Wales before they can undertake work, including emergency response work. In 2007 the Primary Industries Ministerial Council endorsed a model for the national recognition of veterinary registration—known as the NRVR model—to overcome these problems.

Implementation of the national recognition of veterinary registration model requires each jurisdiction to amend its veterinary registration legislation. Whilst all Australian States and Territories have committed to making these amendments, Victoria is the only State to have introduced the national recognition of veterinary registration model so far. On passage of this bill through the Parliament, New South Wales will be the second State to do so and it is anticipated that the other States and Territories will follow shortly. It should be pointed out that vets who are resident and registered in New South Wales will not have deemed registration in States other than Victoria until the other States and Territories pass similar legislation. Once the other States and Territories have passed their legislation, our vets will have the advantage of deemed registration in those jurisdictions as well.

Under the national recognition of veterinary registration model, vets will still have to be registered by the veterinary board in the State or Territory in which they live. However, they will be deemed to be registered in all other Australian jurisdictions, allowing them to practise

in all States and Territories without the need for separate registration in each of the other States. This is an elegant system that streamlines the registration of vets. The bill will be of direct benefit to some 246 interstate vets, including specialist vets, who currently practise and pay registration fees here in New South Wales. Interstate vets will be spared the additional expense of \$235 per year in State registration fees. Adoption of the national recognition of veterinary registration model will be of particular benefit to those vets who practise in regional areas and who regularly undertake work near our State borders. They will soon be free to travel across borders to treat sick or injured animals and to lecture and provide training to other vets or students without incurring additional registration fees.

Currently there are 2,615 vets who reside and practise in New South Wales. They will also benefit from the adoption of the national recognition of veterinary registration model that will in future enable them to practise in other States without the need for separate registration. There are a number of additional benefits that relate to emergency disease response that flow directly from adopting a national registration system. The national recognition of veterinary registration model will allow vets to be mobilised quickly in the event of an outbreak of disease. This has the potential to save New South Wales millions of dollars. The equine influenza outbreak cost the New South Wales Government \$62 million. However, the cost to the equine industry was upwards of \$126 million. It has been estimated that an outbreak of foot and mouth disease could cost the Australian economy up to \$13 billion. In 2001 the United Kingdom experienced one of the most horrendous outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in living memory, resulting in the tragic euthanasing of some six million animals. The financial cost of this outbreak was estimated to be in excess of £3 billion to industry. The British Government paid out £2.5 billion in compensation to cover the costs of euthanasing and disposing of so many animals. The emotional cost to those at the frontline of this disaster was immeasurable. Consistent with the Government's approach to reducing regulation, implementing the national recognition of veterinary registration model in New South Wales will cut red tape for both vets and the Government.

Minor amendments are needed to the Veterinary Practice Act 2003 to introduce a national recognition of veterinary registration model in New South Wales. The bill provides that vets who are registered and reside in other States and Territories will be deemed to be registered in New South Wales. A vet with deemed registration will be able to practise in New South Wales. Similarly, a person with a specialist vet registration in another jurisdiction will have deemed specialist registration in New South Wales. As I have already stated, veterinary boards in all jurisdictions require equivalent veterinary qualifications and practical experience. This provides uniform national standards. The bill ensures that interstate vets practising in New South Wales will meet the same high standards as vets who are registered in New South Wales. I stress that the introduction of a national recognition of veterinary registration model will definitely not lead to any reduction in standards.

Vets whose interstate registration is subject to conditions or limitations will have the same conditions and limitations imposed on their deemed registration in New South Wales. However, the New South Wales Veterinary Practitioners Board will have the power to waive

or vary a condition or limitation on a deemed registration at the request of the holder of the deemed registration. The board may also vary or impose a condition on a vet's deemed registration by giving notice to the vet in writing. But the board may exercise this power only when it is necessary to ensure that the authority conferred by the deemed registration is substantially the same as the authority conferred by the vet's registration in the other jurisdiction. A vet with deemed registration will be able to apply to the New South Wales Administrative Decisions Tribunal for a review of a decision by the board to waive, vary or impose a condition on their deemed registration.

The bill also provides for instances where a vet is suspended from practising or is deregistered in another Australian jurisdiction. In that situation, a person's deemed registration in New South Wales may be suspended or cancelled by the board. In many cases the New South Wales board will decide to suspend or cancel a deemed registration on exactly the same terms as the other jurisdiction. However, there may be reasons why the board would not want to replicate the decision made by another jurisdiction; for example, where the offence that has led to suspension or cancellation is specific to that particular State. It is therefore appropriate to allow the board to have a discretionary power in relation to suspension or cancellation of deemed registrations.

The bill also provides that the board can enter into an arrangement with the other States and Territories to establish a national register of vet practitioners. The national register has been funded and set up by the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council. Victoria is currently the only State to have access to the register. Following the passage of this bill, the national register will also include a list of all the vets registered in New South Wales. The registrar of the New South Wales board will have access to the register, which means that the registrar will be able to view the names of vets registered in other participating States and Territories.

The bill also amends the powers of the Administrative Decisions Tribunal to reflect the introduction of "deemed registration" into the Act. At present, if the tribunal cancels a vet's registration following disciplinary action, it can also order that the vet cannot apply to be re-registered for a specified length of time. The bill adds a similar provision in relation to the cancellation of an interstate vet's deemed registration. A further provision in the bill will require the New South Wales board to notify each interstate registration authority of any disciplinary action taken against a vet. This will ensure current information on all vets' registrations will be available to the veterinary board of each State and Territory.

The Australasian Veterinary Boards Council, the New South Wales Veterinary Practitioners Board, the Australian Veterinary Association and the veterinary industry have all had significant input into the national recognition of veterinary registration model. There is very strong support among the veterinary profession and the livestock industry for national recognition because it is simple to implement, it reduces the regulatory burden on industry, it minimises costs to vets and it facilitates employment mobility. At the same time, the national recognition of veterinary registration model ensures that practice standards are maintained across all jurisdictions. The amendments proposed in this bill will reduce administrative

requirements and provide cost savings to industry and the community. Because they are consistent with the principles of mutual recognition, the amendments will reduce market barriers and increase mobility for vets, which will be of great assistance to buyer security. They are sensible and useful amendments. I commend the bill to the House.