

VETERINARY PRACTICE AMENDMENT (INTERSTATE VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS) BILL 2011

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Second Reading

The Hon. DUNCAN GAY (Minister for Roads and Ports) [12.20 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Veterinary Practice Amendment (Interstate Veterinary Practitioners) Bill 2011 makes straightforward and far-reaching amendments to the Veterinary Practices Act 2003. The bill will implement national recognition of veterinary registration in New South Wales. Significantly, it will simplify the requirements for the registration of interstate vets in New South Wales. Currently an estimated 6,000 vets are registered in other parts of Australia. As a result of these amendments, vets from outside the State will be able to practice in New South Wales without having to register again, which will mean a reduction in costs and red tape for those vets wishing to practice here.

Each Australian State and Territory has its own legislation covering veterinary practice administered by its own veterinary board. In New South Wales we have the Veterinary Practitioners Board. All the boards require equivalent veterinary qualifications and practical experience before a vet can be registered. These requirements provided for a single, uniform, national standard. At present, however, if vets wish to work in more than one State then they must obtain separate registration in each jurisdiction they intend to practice in. This creates an unnecessary administrative burden for governments and additional cost for an increasingly mobile workforce. The current system can also cause delays in responding to animal disease emergencies because interstate vets must be registered in New South Wales before they can undertake work here, including emergency response work.

In 2007 the Primary Industries Ministerial Council endorsed a model for the national recognition of veterinary registration to overcome these problems. Implementation of the national recognition registration model requires each jurisdiction to amend its veterinary registration legislation. Whilst all States and Territories have committed to making these amendments, so far Victoria is the only State to have introduced the model. The bill will mean that New South Wales is the second State to do so. It is anticipated that the other States and Territories will follow shortly.

However, I note that vets who are resident and registered in New South Wales will not have deemed registration in States other than Victoria until these jurisdictions have passed similar legislation. Once the other States and Territories have passed their legislation vets in New South Wales will have the advantage of deemed registration there as well. Under the national recognition 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. This will allow them to practice in all States and Territories without needing separate registration in each jurisdiction they intend to practice in.

This simple and effective system will streamline the registration of vets. The bill will directly benefit 246 interstate vets, including specialist vets, who currently practice and pay registration fees 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 registration model will be of particular benefit to those vets who practice in regional areas and who regularly undertake work near State borders. They will soon be free to travel across State

borders to treat sick or injured animals, and to lecture and provide training to other vets or students without incurring additional registration fees. These are common sense, effective amendments. Currently 2,615 vets reside and practice in New South Wales. These vets will also benefit from the adoption of the national recognition registration model because they will be able to practice in other States without the need for separate registration.

Further benefits relating to emergency disease response will flow directly from adopting a national registration system for vets because it will allow vets to be immobilised quickly in the event of an outbreak of a 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 and 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. It resulted in some six million animals being put down and the financial cost of the outbreak was estimated to be in excess of £3 billion to the industry. The British Government paid £2.5 million in compensation to cover the costs of putting down and disposing of so many animals. The emotional cost to those at the front line of this disaster was immeasurable.

Minor amendments are needed to the Veterinary Practices Act 2003 to introduce the national recognition 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 and will be able to practice in New South Wales. Similarly, a person with a specialist vet registration in another jurisdiction will have deemed specialist registration in New South Wales. I remind members that veterinary boards in all jurisdictions require equivalent veterinary qualifications and practical experience. This provides a high uniform national standard. The bill will ensure that interstate vets practising in New South Wales will meet the same high standards as vets registered here. The introduction of the national recognition registration model will definitely not lead to any reduction in standards.

It is important to note that those 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 a 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. However, there are limitations on the board exercising this power—it may do so only where 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. To ensure procedural fairness, vets with deemed registration will be able to apply to the New South Wales Administrative Decisions Tribunal. They can ask 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 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 may decide to suspend or cancel a deemed registration on exactly the same terms as another jurisdiction has done. However, there may be reasons why the board would not want to replicate the decision made by another jurisdiction. One example would be where the offence that led to the 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 other States and Territories to establish a national register of veterinary 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 amendments being made today the national register will also include a list of all the veterinarians registered in New South Wales. The registrar of the New South Wales board will have access to the register. This means that the registrar will be able to review the names of veterinarians 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 veterinarian's registration following disciplinary action, it can also order that the veterinarian cannot apply to be re-registered for a specific length of time. Such a provision is important in ensuring that high standards of practice are maintained here. The bill adds a similar provision in relation to the cancellation of an interstate veterinarian's deemed registration. A further provision in the bill requires the New South Wales board to notify each interstate registration authority of any disciplinary action taken against a veterinarian. This will ensure that current information on all veterinarian registrations will be available to the veterinary board of each State and Territory.

The Australian 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 registration model. There is strong support among the veterinary profession and the livestock industry for this national recognition. This is because it is simple to implement, reduces the regulatory burden on industry, minimises costs to veterinarians and facilitates employment mobility. At the same time the national recognition of registration model ensures that practise standards are maintained across all jurisdictions.

Consistent with the Government's approach to reducing regulation, implementing the national recognition of registration model in New South Wales will cut red tape for both veterinarians and the Government. The amendments in the bill will reduce administrative requirements and provide cost savings to the industry and the community. Because they are consistent with the principles of mutual recognition, they will reduce market barriers and increase mobility for veterinarians. These are far-reaching, sensible and useful amendments which will benefit rural, regional and city communities in New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.