

Meat Inspection Act

license the plant. That is very similar to what is done with an automobile on the highway. We license the vehicle and license the operator to drive it. If there are troubles with the operator, we simply take away his operator's licence. The vehicle itself can still operate.

In the case of the meat packing establishment, there is presently no provision for separation. Therefore, if there is a problem we simply have to shut the plant down, which I do not believe serves anyone very well. What we are proposing in the Bill is to separate the operator from the establishment so that if there is a problem with the operator, we can stop the operator. The establishment itself will still be licensed and can be operated by someone else which will provide, hopefully, the opportunity for some continuity of service to the producers in that area. I think that makes reasonable sense. If there are some concerns with the way that procedure is to be carried out, those issues can be raised at committee and if there is a problem we can certainly look at it. I hope that clarifies that section.

With regard to Section 22(1) which was raised by the Hon. Member, it is my understanding that Section 21(3) ahead of it has no provision for a jail sentence. It is simply a fine. The legal opinion is that we cannot then come down to a subsequent section of the Act and by the back door make provision for a jail sentence. That section, as it was explained to me—I am not a lawyer but it makes sense to me—is put there to be consistent with the Act. I hope that answers the Hon. Member's question with regard to Section 22(1). We are just being consistent throughout the Bill.

The Hon. Member for Humboldt-Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse) expressed concern with Section 24. Frankly, I do not understand the concern he raises because, as I read the section, it is very clear that the section is designed to make the officers and people associated with the operations of the company financially liable so that they will do exactly the opposite to the concern the Hon. Member raised in his question. Again, if there is some possibility of another interpretation, then I think that is something which should certainly be raised at committee. As I understand it, it is not the intention of the amendment in this Bill to shift the responsibility for any problems which may come about to the inspectors. As I read the section in the Act, it does exactly the opposite. And if my interpretation is correct, then I think that should satisfy the concern of the Hon. Member for Humboldt-Lake Centre.

With regard to the question he raised about Section 20(g) and 20(h) of the Bill, I can tell him that this is nothing new. The provisions to provide for fees are in the present legislation. There really is nothing new. So to say that what is being done by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) with respect to cost recovery in Section 20(g) and Section 20(h) in this Bill is something new is not correct, because there are provisions in the present legislation for fees to be prescribed.

With respect to the comments made by the Hon. Member for Lambton-Middlesex (Mr. Fraleigh) that we have the best meat inspection service in the world, I think that is certainly the case. If we wanted to be a little more modest about it, we

might say that there are no meat inspection services around that are any better—which is another way of saying we have the best. I have been in some of the plants mentioned by the Hon. Member but have not worked under the Act, as has the distinguished Hon. Member for Grey-Simcoe (Mr. Mitges) who is probably as good an authority in this House as we are going to have. I believe we should pay attention to him when he says it is a lot better to work under one Act than to have three or four separate Acts where sometimes there can be mixed signals. Essentially, that is the intention of this Bill.

Going back to the question of how Canada's meat inspection service works, I agree that we do have a very good meat inspection service and the consumer in this country is very well served by it. But that does not mean we cannot improve it even more, especially when we realize what goes on back and forth across the border. Sometimes it gets to be a contest between the different inspectors on each side of the border as to who can be the most picky about the conditions, and I want to suggest that in terms of having some of our plants delicensed, that is more of the reason than our falling down on our side of the border with respect to having a well qualified meat inspection service.

Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, this is a Bill which I think the Government should take responsibility for. It is something which is going to consolidate various Acts and make the whole system work a little better. Hopefully we will find the process a little easier to administer and better understood by the people to whom it applies. It will also be a little more economical to administer. It does provide some additional protection to consumers in the sense that there is provision to reinspect meat products coming in from other countries, which was not there before. It also provides additional protection for the humane slaughter of animals. As I understand it, the present humane slaughter requirements apply only for shipment outside of the province. If the product was not going to move out of the province and there was some question about it, it was previously difficult to make the humane slaughter of animal provisions work. This Bill eliminates that problem because it applies to all products regardless of whether they travel outside of our borders or not. It further protects against the misuse of seals for grading and inspection. I think this is a Bill which should go to committee and if there are some legitimate concerns, and there have been some good questions raised here this morning, I am sure the Minister will be more than happy to take them into consideration in looking at amendments to the Bill.

It is getting very close to one o'clock, Mr. Speaker, and I will conclude.

Mr. Hovdebo: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Bill—

Mr. Althouse: Call it one o'clock.

Mr. Hovdebo: Perhaps I can ask that question after lunch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): It being one o'clock p.m., I do now leave the chair until two o'clock.

At 1 p.m. the House took recess.