

It would be a disaster in the industry in Canada if we ever had an outbreak here. I think we have to impose the most stringent regulations possible on imported meats coming into the country until this risk is removed.

We, on this side of the House in the Official Opposition, do support most of the provisions in this particular bill. However, I again want to place on record that, in terms of cost recovery in the areas I have outlined, we do want the government to re-evaluate the position it has taken. I say that in view of the low returns to producers and in view of the fact that innocent farmers within a quarantine area could be forced to make huge expenditures as a result of a disease that came into that area through no negligence on their part but through occurrences beyond their control.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to make a few remarks at this time for two reasons. The first is to welcome you to your new position. We have appreciated the work you have done in your position over the last number of months and look forward to working co-operatively with you in the future to ensure that the House of Commons works as it ought to work, in terms of a balanced approach to legislation and an opportunity for all members to be heard. We offer our co-operation always with the Chair.

I am also pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the provisions of Bill C-66 regarding animal diseases. I have waited some time for this. I must say at the outset that my hon. colleague from Moose Jaw—Lake Centre was also hoping to participate in the debate today, but at the moment he is held up in committee work. So, I have an opportunity, in his stead, to make some remarks about Bill C-66.

I want to begin by suggesting that one of the items that concern members of the New Democratic Party is the extra charges that will be attached to the livestock industry as a result of this legislation. I do not have to remind members of the House of Commons that these days the livestock industry is being challenged on virtually every front. Costs are continuing to increase while prices—although they are holding in some parts of the country at this moment—are not increasing in the same way. There is a financial crunch being felt by the livestock industry, to say nothing of what high interest rates do to the industry.

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The legislation before us clearly points out that the user-pay concept, the extra charges, and the cost recovery that will be involved will mean added cost to livestock producers. When it is perceived that there is disease in your herd, there is a lot of cost involved in the round-up and assembly of the animals and, in some cases, the transportation of animals. In addition to those costs, the livestock producer will have the cost of service charges attached to the attempt to eliminate, eradicate or check out the disease. I want to flag that as an item that we will be raising in committee.

I should say at the outset that we support this bill. It is a housekeeping bill in a lot of ways. That is not to say that there are not concerns and shortcomings that we will want to raise in committee. We believe that modification to the legislation would make it better, both for the Government of Canada and for the livestock industry.

I believe that the fines involved for a summary conviction are appropriate. The ticketing proposal is a good one. It will allow a streamlining in dealing with infractions. Prior to this bill, Agriculture Canada had to rely on the Criminal Code for any punishment for offenders. Now it has its own authority through the issuance of tickets, much the same as for a speeding offence. If you admit you are guilty, you do not have to go to court and go through a long process. I think this streamlining is in the best interests of the Department of Agriculture and the industry itself.

The purpose of the bill before us is to control diseases and toxic substances in animals and products. It also strengthens Canada's ability to prevent the entry of diseases in animals which have serious economic impacts attached to them, and also to control or to eradicate outbreaks of a variety of diseases. The act broadens the mandate under the scope of diseases. Prior to this Agriculture Canada could destroy an animal if it had tuberculosis, rabies or brucellosis, for example, because the disease was affecting the animals. Now it can destroy an animal if whatever it has is also transmittable to humans. To accomplish this, the inspectors will have greater powers and the department can control movement by blocking roads and ordering the disinfection of certain vehicles.

Regarding compensation, the act will allow Agriculture Canada to set a maximum for compensation across the board for all species and all programs. We have some concerns with this because, for example, the current