

On motion of Senator Nurgitz, bill referred to Committee of the Whole.

HEALTH OF ANIMALS BILL

SECOND READING

Hon. Nathan Nurgitz moved the second reading of Bill C-66, respecting diseases and toxic substances that may affect animals or that may be transmitted by animals to persons, and respecting the protection of animals.

He said: Honourable senators, today we have been asked to consider Bill C-66, the Health of Animals Bill. The subject matter contained in that bill are those matters that would have been known to honourable senators as having been in the Animal Disease and Protection Act. Bill C-66 represents the cornerstone of the government's and the agri-food industry's commitment to maintaining high standards in animal health. Canada's reputation for animal products is second to none in the world marketplace, and this bill will ensure that that status is maintained.

Legislation covering this area was first passed in 1869 and was last amended in 1974 as the Animal Disease and Protection Act. The current bill has been the basis for controlling costly livestock and poultry diseases. Under the bill, for example, Canada has been declared free of brucellosis and tuberculosis in cattle. The amended legislation will be an important part of government programs that ensure Canada's food supply is free of toxic substances and food-borne diseases. In particular, it will strengthen our ability to prevent the entry into Canada of farm animal diseases that have serious economic implications, such as foot and mouth disease. It will also provide the authority for a national identification system for animals, which will allow for the identification of animals suspected of harbouring disease-carrying agents, and which is essential in controlling and eradicating diseases.

The bill will also allow Canada to assist other countries in their efforts to control or eradicate animal diseases. As well, Bill C-66 will provide for more flexibility in determining how compensation shall be paid for animals ordered destroyed. Producers will also have their costs covered in cases where the government decides that affected animals should be treated rather than destroyed. The legislation also provides for cost recovery or designation of responsibility for costs of some of the services provided by government. The bill will also allow qualified people, other than public servants, to carry out the duties and functions of inspectors on behalf of the Government of Canada. The Minister of Agriculture will have the authority to designate qualified people as inspectors. This means the privatization of such things as laboratory services and inspection and testing for animal diseases.

Many insects—known as vectors—spread disease. The legislation allows the department to control imports so that these vectors will not be released into the environment. As Canadians grow increasingly concerned about the welfare of animals, this legislation will provide new powers to regulate the way animals are kept.

[The Hon. the Speaker.]

• (1600)

Those who contravene the bill will find that the penalties have been updated to reflect present economic realities. For example, fines for summary conviction offences can run up to \$50,000. For indictable offences, penalties can go as high as \$200,000 and/or up to two years in jail. As well, Agriculture inspectors will be able to issue tickets in less serious cases. As I indicated with respect to plant protection, this will eliminate expensive court proceedings.

In summary, Bill C-66 will ensure that we maintain an efficient and competitive Canadian agriculture industry. It will also ensure that the Canadian population is protected against the spread of disease and toxic materials from animals.

Hon. Dan Hays: Honourable senators, once again Senator Nurgitz has covered briefly, but adequately I believe, the provisions of this legislation. For my part, there is not much to add. However, a couple of things have come to my attention as I have gone through background materials on Bill C-66, one of which is the application of clause 3 of the legislation, which gives primacy to federal legislation over provincial legislation, or at least provincial governments. This is something on which it will be interesting to hear from our witnesses in Committee of the Whole.

As Senator Nurgitz has noted, this legislation provides for cost recovery, and I will not repeat my comments. I believe that the type of things this bill provides for are quite properly borne by Canadians as a whole rather than by the people who are using the services provided for in the legislation.

Honourable senators, I might leave Senator Nurgitz with a question. Perhaps he or the witnesses will be able to deal with it. Will this legislation provide for the type of problem that is occurring in Great Britain now with bovine spongiform encephalopathy? "Mad cow disease" might be a better way to describe it. Perhaps Senator Nurgitz would like to comment on that, or it may be more appropriate for the witnesses to do so. In any event, that concludes my remarks.

Senator Nurgitz: Honourable senators, I know very little about mad cow disease—

The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*: Honourable senators, if the Honourable Senator Nurgitz speaks now, his speech will have the effect of closing debate at second reading of this bill.

Senator Nurgitz: On a more serious note, honourable senators, the witness who will be appearing before the Committee of the Whole has a distinguished background in veterinary medicine. I am sure he can discuss with our colleague, Senator Hays, mad cow disease, among other things. This is probably an appropriate time to do it.

Senator Frith: Do mad cows go out in the noonday sun?

Senator Nurgitz: No, I think those were mad dogs and Englishmen.

Motion agreed to and bill read second time.