

the Chief Inspector following the necessary training.

While stock routes have not been used extensively for driving cattle since the 1960s, powers are retained to control the slow rate of travel, or to close stock routes in order to protect the stock routes.

Madam Speaker, I commend the bill to honourable members and table the explanatory statement to accompany the bill.

Debate adjourned.

PLANT HEALTH BILL (Serial 15)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr VATSKALIS (Primary Industry, Fisheries and Resources): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to introduce new plant health legislation for the Northern Territory. It will replace the existing *Plant Diseases Control Act 1979*.

The value of field and fodder crops, hay, silage, pasture seeds, forestry and horticultural industries in the Northern Territory was estimated at \$164m in 2006. In that year, this provided full-time employment for 612 people and 3526 part-time. Plants also contribute to the livestock industries by providing native and improved pastures, and, of course, native flora is in integral part of the Territory's natural environment, contributing to biodiversity, recreation and tourism.

Incursions of exotic pests and diseases have impacts on plant-based industries in the Northern Territory, reducing yields, affecting the quality of products and interrupting trade. Horticultural crops, as well as grain, fodder, pastures, forestry and native plants can all be affected.

Effective legislation is an integral part of preventing the spread of pests and diseases by complementing surveillance and control activities, and by facilitating trade in healthy plants and their products. In recognition of this, all states, territories and the Commonwealth have enacted legislation related to plant health. In fact, the Northern Territory has had ordinances and acts relating to plant health going back to 1918.

Plant health legislation provides a basis upon which responsibilities for the management of pests and diseases can be delegated and legally enforced if necessary.

The need for a new act has become evident in recent years. Honourable members may recall publicity about outbreaks of the Philippines Fruit Fly, Panama Disease in bananas, Grapevine Leaf Rust and Spiralling White Fly in the Northern Territory in the past 10 years. These outbreaks disrupted local production, or required the implementation of quarantine measures to prevent spread to other parts of the Territory or Australia. During their management, deficiencies in the effectiveness of the current legislation became evident in terms of the efficiency of surveys and control activities. In addition, a Northern Territory Quarantine Review in 1999 recommended that the *Plant Diseases Control Act* be reviewed to bring it up-to-date.

Many plant pests and diseases that occur overseas or interstate pose major biosecurity threats to the Northern Territory. To mention just two, Black Sigatoka in bananas and the Red-banded Mango Caterpillar could enter the Territory from overseas or Queensland, affecting horticultural production, causing economic losses and requiring considerable expenditure for control.

Their management will require well planned programs, coupled with an effective legislative base to prevent spread and control infestations. As well as complementing on-ground plant management practices, plant health legislation can assist in facilitating trade in healthy plants by providing a legal basis for market accreditation. The Northern Territory is party to a memorandum of understanding on Interstate Certification Assurance which is a national system of plant health certification accepted by all states and territories.

The assurance scheme assists in pest management by reducing the risk of spread between jurisdictions. This is achieved through certification of products or plants by the producer that they meet certain pest management requirements. The NT Quarantine Review recommended that administration of the assurance scheme needed legislative backing, as required by the memorandum of understanding.

In developing this bill, my department considered deficiencies in the existing legislation, examined similar legislation elsewhere in Australia, studied documents relating to Australian plant pest response agreements, and undertook two public consultations.

The second consultation in 2006 included circulation of a discussion draft of the proposed act. It was mailed to 90 stakeholders inviting comments. It was the subject of extensive advertising in the Territory media and was made available on the Internet. Meetings were held at