

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill now be referred to the Economic Policy Scrutiny Committee for report by 1 May 2018.

Motion agreed to.

**ANIMAL PROTECTION BILL
(Serial 44)**

Mr VOWLES (Primary Industry and Resources): Madam Speaker, I present a bill entitled the Animal Protection Bill 2018 (Serial 44), and table the explanatory statement and statement of compatibility with human rights.

I move that the bill be now read a first time.

Today, I am delighted to present that Animal Protection Bill 2018 to honourable members. The purpose of this bill is to create a new Animal Protection Act to strengthen policies applying to animal welfare and protection, and ensure that governance in such matters are undertaken more effectively in the Northern Territory. This bill also serves to repeal the existing *Animal Welfare Act*, enacted back in 1999 which has been in operation for nearly 19 years.

The introduced bill aligns and builds upon the existing regulatory framework in the Territory and puts in place clearly defined rights, roles and responsibilities for government, industry and the community on matters of animal welfare.

For those in the Assembly with longer memories, the reform process to strengthen the Territory's principle animal welfare statute has been a long road. The catalyst for this journey started back in 2009 and 2010 at Mataranka Station, where over 100 cattle died of starvation. These events shocked the Territory and caused community outrage. In response, both an Ombudsman's investigation and a separate parliamentary inquiry were held.

In November 2011 the then bipartisan Council of Territory Co-operation Animal Welfare Governance Subcommittee tabled its report in the Legislative Assembly. The report addressed the animal welfare issue arising from the cattle deaths at Mataranka Station. The report made 21 recommendations relating to the Territory's existing and related procedures.

I acknowledge the good work undertaken by that subcommittee, which, at the time, included two members of the current Assembly: the Member for Nelson, Mr Gerry Wood; and our Honourable Speaker, Kezia Purick. Thank you both for your committed and continuing efforts over many years to improve animal welfare in the Territory.

In response to the subcommittee's 2011 report, the then NT Government devised a two-stage approach. The first stage involved the drafting of new amendments to strengthen provisions under the existing *Animal Welfare Act*, with the second stage being a review of the act.

In May 2012 the Animal Welfare Amendment Bill 2012 was introduced into the Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, the bill lapsed as parliament was prorogued in August of that year due to the NT election. In December 2012 the Animal Welfare Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2012 was passed by the new Legislative Assembly. These amendments helped strengthen the act by streamlining and rationalising the roles, functions and powers of the Animal Welfare Authority.

Since 2013 the Animal Welfare Branch, which serves as the operational arm of the Animal Welfare Authority, has been located within the Department of Primary Industry and Resources. Previous responsibility for the act was held by the then department of Local Government.

Each year the animal welfare branch receives in excess of 500 reports relating to matters of animal welfare. The branch averages around seven successful prosecutions per annum for animal welfare offences.

Unfortunately, the hard-working and dedicated team of authorised officers are confronted by acts of cruelty and neglect that are both confronting and disturbing. I wish to convey my sincere thanks on behalf of this Assembly to those fine men and women for their strong and enduring commitment to the welfare of animals in the Northern Territory.