

Motion agreed to; bills read a second time.

Mr PALMER (Primary Industry and Fisheries)(by leave): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the bills be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; bills read a third time.

MEAT INDUSTRIES BILL
(Serial 175)

Continued from 22 August 1996.

Mr BELL (MacDonnell): Mr Speaker, I have taken an interest in this bill as opposition spokesman for primary industry and fisheries and as someone with an interest in the meat industry in the Territory. I represent a number of properties, and I have visited more than my share of abattoirs in the time that I have been a member of the Assembly. I have some general comments as well as some more specific points to make.

Frequent reference is made in this Assembly to the success, and the value to many people, of the live cattle trade. The downside is that the meat processing industries in the Northern Territory have decreased dramatically over the 15 years that I have been in this Assembly. The reasons for that are not simple, and I think they should be the subject of more debate and analysis by the Country Liberal Party administration than they are currently. I believe the live cattle trade is very good for producers, but we should be endeavouring to maintain employment in the Territory in the meat processing industries.

I recall that, 10 years ago, a number of abattoirs operated in the Territory, including those at Point Stuart and Mudginberri. They are no longer operating. The Katherine abattoir has been pretty quiet over the last few years. I think it still operates occasionally, though very rarely. The abattoir in Tennant Creek has been closed for a decade at least. In Alice Springs, the Wamboden abattoir continues to operate but the Alice Springs abattoir has been closed for many years. It is unfortunate that we are not processing in the Territory to the extent that we were previously. It is a difficult industry. The markets are very variable, but I believe that more analysis of market opportunities for chilled beef should be the subject of ministerial statements, and it is a matter of concern to me that that has not occurred.

Turning to the substance of the bill, the minister referred to the HACCP procedures which involve, as I understand it, an inspection and quality control process in abattoirs for dealing with problems where contamination of meat may occur. It is highly commendable that we should develop standards in that regard. However, I look back on cases in which there have been breakdowns in meat inspection arrangements and I am concerned that the HACCP controls operate if everybody wants them to operate and if abattoir owners are not under serious cost pressures. I think of the meat substitution scandal in the early 1980s and the relationship between inspectors and abattoir operators that was highlighted by the royal commission at that time. It seems to me that the clear bad faith demonstrated by a number of people, whose shortcomings were demonstrated by that royal commission, will not be guarded against with a new set of procedures.