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Bill No. 59 – The Animal Identification Amendment Act, 2012

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise tonight to enter into Bill No. 59, An Act to amend The Animal Identification Act and it's one that . . . You know, it's always interesting to prepare for these bills because it's not one that I have thought much about, you know. I do come from a farm background, but we were wheat growers and basically that was it; did not have animals. And so you learn a little bit every time you rise to enter into debate, but it's one that's clearly important.

You know, we saw that this summer with the crisis at XL in Brooks, Alberta when consumer confidence in the agricultural system was really shaken. And it has huge impacts and sometimes, rightly or wrongly, confidence is eroded and challenged. And it's important that we do all that we can to ensure that people have the confidence in the system, and that when we need to improve things, we clearly will do that. And so this is what this bill here really speaks to — how we can do and innovate and make sure we are doing the right thing.

Now there has been other speakers and I know my colleague from Regina Lakeview talked about, is this simply a method to allow contracting out? We don't know. It'll be interesting to see what impact it has on the Ministry of Agriculture that really did look after the brand services. But we'll go through this. And I do want to first . . . What I'll do is, you know, I'll take a look at The Animal Identification Act. And it was revised in 1978 — this is the bill — and then again revised '96, '98, and 2000. And it talks about . . . I mean the full title is An Act respecting the Registration, Application, and Implantation of Animal Identification Marks. And of course the marks really are the way to identify . . . In fact I should be clear about that because I'll go through these definitions here because it's important to understand what we're talking about, that we're not just talking about cattle, but we're talking about “. . . any head of cattle or [any] other animal of the bovine species, any horse or other animal of the equine species, any sheep, goat or swine or any inter-species hybrid of the same.”

So it's much more than just cattle. And this gets back to one of the questions I have in the bill. The amendments seem to focus on cattle, and maybe that's what the direction they want to go, but we'll have a question about, is the same happening? And of course clearly the others are not nearly the . . . Well swine is a significant number there too, but cattle is really the focus of the amendment bill before us as well. But I want to talk about what the mark means. The mark means any brand or “. . . permanent mark applied to the exterior of an animal or any device implanted beneath the skin or within the body of the animal, but does not include any mark registered under the authority of the Livestock Pedigree Act.”

And I'm not sure what that Act is. I don't have a copy of that. But it does talk about what we traditionally think about brands that are applied or burnt to the skin, marks like that, or ear brands. So I think that it's important that we know that. And we know with science now today too that it's important that there are different ways, more humane ways of doing this, and whether, I don't know whether . . . I assume ear tags would be part of this, devices implanted beneath the skin or within the body of the animal. So that's very important.

And then this whole new section is put in between section 2 and section 3 and that's where it goes, but I do think that it's important. This is a pretty thorough piece of legislation. At the beginning it does provide the frame, the framework for our discussion here. So this is an important piece of legislation. It talks about inspectors. Interestingly, “Every member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is, by virtue of his position, an inspector under this Act and has the same powers and duties that are conferred or imposed on an inspector by this Act and the regulations.”

I did not know that. It's interesting that an RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] officer is a brand, a mark inspector. So that's very interesting. And routine inspections talks about all of that kind of stuff. So very important that we understand the framework for which this legislation is part of.

I think that I do want to say that I've read the minister's remarks, and I have to say that the minister's remarks are more full and more in plain English than many of the other ministers, and so I do appreciate that. And you know, it was interesting, Mr. Speaker, that it did come up . . . It's interesting where things come up but, Mr. Speaker, as you may know, I did this series of labour consultations throughout September and lo and behold, somebody made a comment about the consultations that the Minister of Agriculture is doing and how his were so much different, so much different than the Minister of Labour. The Minister of Agriculture was taking much more time, approximately six months, and doing this kind of work and having the buy-in, the support of the affected stakeholders and clearly had a stronger understanding of appropriate consultations. And clearly we're seeing the results of that.

Now he's not saying the consultations are over, but he's preparing for the end and he's saying that he doesn't want to be caught in a box where it seems that this is where this committee is going. This is where they're landing, that they want to have more flexibility in terms of brand inspection services, and that that would be done by parties outside the

government. And that's where they're landing. And it seems that that's, if you do the consultations in an appropriate way that you do get support and people do rally behind, and I think this is important.

So he goes on and I just want to quote some of the things that he says, and this is very important because for all of us in the House, some of us may be up to speed on what brand inspection services are; some of us may not be. But he clarifies that by saying, "Brand inspection ensures that animals offered for sale are rightfully owned and verified through a brand registry. The messages come in loud and clear from livestock producers that they want and need a brand inspection service." And then he says that the changes will allow for that service.

Now I'm not sure he meant a new, improved service because it seems that we already do have a service, but that these folks want something improved. Interestingly he talks about what's happening across Western Canada, that the role of government is unique here in Saskatchewan. No other agricultural commodity is purchased or sold in the province with a government service to verify ownership. In fact Alberta, BC, both have industry-led and -delivered brand inspection services. And Manitoba interestingly has no brand inspection services at all. That's very interesting. I'm not sure why that is. Clearly their programs work. I'm not sure. But it's interesting that the member made those comments.

Now as he said, he announced on July 30th that he announced the formation of an industry advisory committee to review the delivery of brand inspections in Saskatchewan, and he's met several times. And clearly that is something that people have noted and said, why can't we be doing that with other kinds of consultations. People in the labour movement have noted that they're taking more time to talk about brands and animal identification than they are talking about the 15 pieces of labour legislation that took 100 years to put together. So this is really interesting.

[21:45]

Now I just want to touch on one other point that he talks about. Towards the end he talks, and I quote:

Mr. Speaker, this proposed legislation is enabling in nature. It is necessary to allow for the new delivery model when it is finalized in 2013. The exact details of the new model remain to be determined as the committee works towards its final recommendations. We want to ensure that we are not limited by the current inability of this Act to allow for third party delivery in 2013.

Now I think those are important words because he talks about how it is enabling. But if you look at the legislation, he talks about the new section 2.1(2), for the purposes of carrying out the minister's responsibilities, the minister may do. And he talks about may create, develop, adopt, co-ordinate, implement policy strategies, and so on and so forth; undertake and coordinate planning, research, investigations, and so forth; provide information and do any other thing that the minister may consider appropriate to carrying out the minister's responsibilities.

But this is the part that I think is important. The minister talks about in section 2.2(3) . . . And when we talk about agreements and clearly whether this is contracting out or just a new model of how to do business in agriculture, he does say that the “. . . animal identification inspection administration agreement must include provisions that specify all of the following . . .” So I think this is a good thing. That while it’s empowering, there are requirements that the minister is setting out. That if they are entering into agreements, all of the following . . . And there’s several agreed parts to it. I won’t go through all of it.

But that it’s important that we recognize that there are requirements and that they must be there, for example the expected outcomes to be achieved by the person; the powers and duties being delegated to the person with whom the agreement is being entered into. And it’s not . . . A person means more than just . . . A person can be a corporation, a group, a co-op, that type of thing. The acceptance by the person of their responsibilities; the requirement that the person must report to the minister and when these requirements must be done; requirements for records management, and so on and so forth; that the person must carry out adequate insurance, all of that type of thing; the obligation of the parties if the agreement is terminated; settlement of disputes. So these things are all laid out.

So, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that there are requirements within the agreement. That it’s not a may or leaving it up in the air. That it clearly . . . The duties are laid out because this is a significant change for a significant industry, agricultural sector, that a lot of people are hoping and looking forward to the results of this, the advisory committee and the minister’s work. But if this is the kind of work that’s coming out, it looks like that they’re taking it very seriously. And of course we’ll have questions in committee.

But I think that that’s good that we see some of the extensions that they may be doing. And, may, is the key word in terms of the kind of, as I say, extensions or the things that people would like to see done. But there are obligations that the minister will ensure will be done, and that’s very, very important. So when we see these kind . . . And we’re not sure whether it’s one agreement or many agreements, but this is important.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that while there’s more things that we would like to say about this Bill No. 59, it is an important one because as you know that we, as consumers . . . And I think more and more I know . . . And we see the billboards up in our cities about farms and ranches and how they take care of their animals. And they’re very sensitive about how consumers view the production of food in our society that when we see an Act like this that it’s done in a thoughtful way.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that it’s one that I know that many of us will have a lot of questions about and one that we’ll watch the work of the committee very closely and one that will be taken very seriously because, as I said, consumer confidence is critical. And in Saskatchewan we have such a great reputation in terms of the provincial herd, the cattlemen, and I think that, you know, we’ve talked about this many times, many forums, about being great stewards of the land but also the great caretakers of the animals that they are looking after and bringing to market.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I know that many of us will have lots to say about this. But at

this time I would like to move adjournment of Bill No. 59, An Act to amend the Animal Identification Act. Thank you.

