

DRAFT SECOND READING SPEECH

HON. JEREMY ROCKLIFF MP

Biological Control Amendment Bill 2016

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Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this Bill is to amend the *Biological Control Act 1986* to alter the definition of an organism so as to include viruses and sub-viral agents.

The *Biological Control Act 1986* is mirrored by similar legislation in all jurisdictions and provides a legislative framework for assessing and consulting on proposed biological control activities, to ensure that they are in the public interest.

The Act provides for the declaration of 'target organisms' (for example, the weed gorse) and 'agent organisms' (for example, the gorse spider mite), and contains provisions to ensure that biological control activities are subject to liability protection and can proceed without interruption by litigation.

In 2015 the Australian Government received legal and scientific advice that the definition of an organism may not adequately cover the use of viruses and sub-viral agents. The use of viruses have been key to controlling rabbit populations across the country, using myxomatosis and since 1996, rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV1), also known as calici virus. A new strain of RHDV, originating from Korea, known as K5, is planned for release in autumn 2017.

A sub-viral agent is a taxonomic category that includes viroids, satellite viruses and prions, agents that are smaller than viruses and have some of their properties. This category is included because it is plausible that sub-viral agents may also be useful as agents for biological control in the future.

The amendments being proposed aim to avoid doubt and to remove ambiguity, making it clear into the future that the Act is intended to support the declaration of viruses and sub-viruses as agents and targets for biological control activities.

The proposed amendments do not alter the scope of Act and are consistent with the original intent of the legislation. The Bill will not affect the process for approving future biological agents or targets or reduce the rigour applied to the scientific, technical or safety procedures and standards applying to biological control.

Importantly, the amendments will provide greater certainty for institutions undertaking research into new biological control targets and agents, and for land managers and farmers involved in biological control programs.

Tasmanian agriculture and the environment have for a long time benefited from the use of biological control agents. The myxoma virus (which causes myxomatosis) to control rabbits became available in Tasmania in the early 1950's and calici in 1997 as a new control. Several weed species have been the focus of biological programs, including gorse, ragwort, blackberry, English broom, cape broom and boneseed. These weed programs have allowed for the trialling and safe use of multiple agents and provide a cost effective method of reducing the amount of chemicals being used.

It is my intention to have these amendments in place for the planned national release of the new calici strain RHDV-K5 by autumn 2017. There has been significant planning and research underpinning the intended release of K5. Measures to protect domestic and farmed rabbits are the same as for the existing strain of calici (RHDVI). That is, the current RHDVI vaccination works for K5 and owners, breeders and farmers of rabbits are encouraged to have in place robust biosecurity measures.

The amendments will also ensure that Tasmania is able to participate in future national biological control programs. For example, several years of work by Australian scientists has demonstrated that the naturally occurring virus, *Cyprinid herpesvirus-3* (carp herpesvirus), has the potential to be an effective agent for the biological control of common carp. Whilst carp are not as widespread in Tasmania as on the mainland, they continue to be a threat to our freshwater environment.

I commend this Bill to the House.