

## SECOND READING SPEECH

### **VETERINARY SURGEONS AMENDMENT BILL 2011**

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

The primary purpose of this bill is to amend the Veterinary Surgeons Act to allow national recognition of veterinary registration.

The Veterinary Surgeons Act was last amended in 2005 and many provisions have remained unchanged since the Act was passed over 20 years ago. During that time there have been changes in policy, practice and community expectations relating to the regulation of veterinary practice. A secondary objective of the Bill is to update the Act to reflect those changes.

In 2008, the Primary Industries Ministerial Council agreed to introduce national recognition of registration of veterinary surgeons, a move that is supported by the Veterinary Board of Tasmania. At present, veterinary surgeons may only practice in the state in which they are registered. As a result, veterinary surgeons wishing to practice in more than one jurisdiction must hold multiple registrations. The cost of this is not insubstantial and is ultimately passed on to the consumer.

Recognition of national registration will reduce the costs of veterinary practice and remove a barrier to competition. Tasmanians will have increased access to veterinary specialists, locums and consultants based interstate. It will also enhance our capability to mobilise the national veterinary profession in response to emergency animal disease outbreaks.

Under the model agreed to by Ministerial Council, veterinarians are required to be registered in the jurisdiction in which they live. The amendment allows interstate registered veterinarians who do not permanently reside in Tasmania to practice here.

When practising in Tasmania, however, they will be subject to Tasmanian law. Furthermore, any sanctions or conditions imposed on their registration interstate will apply to their capacity to practice here. Of course, this will require jurisdictions to share registration information and the Bill provides for this.

Under this arrangement, Tasmanians can expect to benefit from increased competition and greater choice in veterinary services. At the same time, they can continue to be confident that people providing those

services are suitably qualified and maintain acceptable professional standards.

Throughout the Act, responsibilities which apply to veterinary service companies have been extended to apply to all entities providing veterinary services.

Veterinary services are defined in the Act. They are services which, in the interests of animal welfare, should only be undertaken by a registered veterinarian, or under their direct supervision.

This Bill expands the definition of veterinary services to improve clarity and cover some current practices. At the same time, care has been taken to ensure that procedures which are, and should be, undertaken by lay people are exempt from the definition. Where provision is made for procedures to be performed by a lay person under direct supervision, the Bill clarifies that the supervising veterinary surgeon must actually be present.

The Bill updates the functions and powers of the Veterinary Board of Tasmania, bringing them into line with current practice and expectations.

One of the Board's functions is to ensure that persons registered as veterinary surgeons and specialists in Tasmania are appropriately qualified. As occurs in other Australian jurisdictions, the Board relies on the recommendations of the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council, which accredits courses and qualifications for veterinary surgeons and veterinary specialists.

The Bill provides for the Council's accreditation role to be recognised and reflected in legislation. It also ensures that the Board's decisions to register veterinary surgeons and specialists are not subject to legal challenge.

The Board will become responsible for determining veterinary specialities, rather than these being prescribed by Regulation. This will expedite the process of approving veterinary specialties.

The community expects that veterinary surgeons, like other professionals, will practice with adequate skill and competency. They also expect them to keep abreast of advances in current knowledge and accepted practice. To meet this expectation, provision has been made for the Board to make and maintain veterinary service standards. The

Board has also been given power to ensure that veterinary surgeons practice according to these standards.

In practice, effective enforcement of standards requires the Board to have access to appropriate information without hindrance. The Bill requires all veterinary service providers to keep adequate records which are accessible. To enable the Board to retrieve information from those records, the powers of inspectors have been expanded to allow them to obtain copies of records and documents. Inspectors are also given the power to require assistance to access information.

With respect to the investigations of complaints, a time limit of 3 years is to be introduced for the lodging of a complaint against a veterinary surgeon. This is consistent with limitations in other jurisdictions and creates certainty for practitioners.

There are other changes which will lighten the regulatory burden on the veterinary profession and align Tasmania with other jurisdictions. These include a reduction in the time for which records must be kept by practitioners, and removal of the requirement to have business names approved by the Board.

The registration fees for veterinary surgeons are currently set by Regulation. The Bill will allow the Board to set and review fees to reflect national measures. The due date for fees would also change from 1 March to 1 January to bring Tasmania into line with other jurisdictions. The amendment provides for the Board to retain the fees and use them to fund the activities of the Board.

In conclusion, this Bill will meet our commitment to introduce national recognition of veterinary registration. It will deliver improved access to veterinary services for Tasmanians and ensure that those services meet contemporary minimum standards. Mr Speaker, I commend this Bill to the House.