



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

BILLS

**Criminal Code Amendment
(Food Contamination) Bill 2018**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 20 September 2018

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP

Source House
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Responder
Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (10:06): The shadow Attorney-General might think that it's best to kick the can down the road, and again go into a period of analysis, thinking and reflection, but we take no advice from Labor on this and we make no apology for moving swiftly and decisively.

What idiot puts a needle in a strawberry? What act of criminal recklessness should be tolerated? Absolutely none. This government is taking action and taking it quickly. There are three simple reasons why we need to have this bill passed and passed quickly: (1) for personal reasons (2) for economic reasons and (3) for reasons of national security.

Like many people in this chamber, I'm a parent. I've got a six-year-old little girl at home. I've got a seven-month-old little boy at home. Sabotaging a piece of fruit that could be swallowed by a child—anyone for that matter but particularly a child—is horrific.

The increase in penalties that this bill represents is needed. We need to ensure that particularly children who might be vulnerable are protected. We need a call out to the mums and dads to make sure not only that their kids are safe but that their kids are not doing silly things, trying to stick stuff in fruit. Make sure you and your children aren't putting things on social media. I heard from another strawberry farmer this morning who was complaining about images on social media of things in fruit going viral. Check out your kids' Facebook pages and Instagram accounts. Let's make sure that irresponsible activity on social media stops. We need to protect each other and our families.

There are serious economic reasons too. There are 300 strawberry farmers in Queensland. Together with the member for Fisher, and the member for Longman across the aisle, I'm from the Sunny Coast, which is the centre of strawberry growing in Queensland. We've already had one farmer close and 100 businesses close down. We've had the Twist brothers that had to get out of the industry only a few weeks ago because it's such a tough industry to operate in after many, many years. I heard again from another grower, Di West, about some of the challenges of exporting strawberries amidst this existing crisis. I've spoken to the Strawberry Growers Association, who have similar concerns. This is having a detrimental impact on our economy. We are renowned across the world for food safety and food quality. Once these start getting challenged by reckless criminal behaviour, we need to take action and ensure the right deterrence measures are in place.

Lastly, this is also a matter of national security. We talk about security in strategic terms, and more recently we've been speaking about it in terms of general infrastructure. Food security is key to this country. We need to ensure our supply chains in the food industry remain secure and safe. If you put a needle or any other item into a food product, you are a coward and need to be deterred. If you support people who fearmonger on this or spread images on social media unnecessarily then you too are to blame. This is a time when this chamber and the country need to come together, and so this morning we need to ensure we're eating our strawberries. Tomorrow let's have strawberries on our yoghurt in the morning, a strawberry smoothie for morning tea and a few strawberries in a strawberry cheesecake at lunchtime. If you want, for anybody over the age of 18, maybe a strawberry daiquiri would be all right. Let this weekend be the weekend of strawberries and let's be proud. We are Australian, we love our berries and we're not going to cop any idiot trying to put anything more in our strawberries.