

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2017) OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

61ST Sitting

Thursday, 9TH February, 2017

The Assembly convened at 2.08 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Visit by the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other Officers

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have, in our midst this afternoon, the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme, her Deputy and a number of officers from the United Nations Department of Political Affairs. They are visiting Guyana and did call on me yesterday in connection with discussions concerning constitutional reform. They have expressed a wish and we have invited them to be present this afternoon and, for as long as they would wish to remain, they are welcomed. And so, I bid you welcome and I hope that what you will observe you will find of great interest.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Paper and Report were laid:

- (i) Annual Report of the Guyana Gold Board for the year 2015.

- (ii) Audited Financial Statement for the Guyana Gold Board for the year ended 31st December, 2015. [*Minister of Natural Resources*]

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following Report was laid:

Minutes of Proceedings of the sixth meeting of the Committee of Selection held on Monday, 30th January, 2017 [*Mr. Speaker – Chairman*]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

BILLS – Second Readings

ANIMAL WELFARE BILL 2016 – Bill No. 21/2016

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to deal with the welfare of animals; to provide for their protection and health; and connected matters.” [*Minister of Agriculture*]

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Holder]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Animal Welfare Bill 2016 – Bill No. 21/2016 be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, I am very pleased to be here to address the current animal welfare systems in Guyana through the introduction of an Animal Welfare Bill. I should say, at the outset, that animal welfare is an issue of very high importance since the global consumption of animal protein is increasing rapidly.

Welfare encompasses both physical and psychological well-being, therefore, a multipronged approach is proposed through this Bill. Animal welfare incorporates all aspects of an animal's wellbeing, including housing, nutrition, disease prevention and treatment, transport, and humane slaughter, be it livestock or companion animals.

This Animal Welfare Bill was drafted in 2011 to fulfil Guyana's readiness to access the export market for non-traditional agricultural products, which was driven by the Agricultural Export

Diversification Project, referred to as ADP, an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funded project under the previous Administration. It was discussed in Cabinet in 2014 but was never placed before this House. The Animal Welfare Bill was seen as a complement to the Food Safety Bill and a means in its own right to raise Guyana's status as a food producing country in the international market place.

This Bill has gone through numerous consultation processes and has even been an inspiration to other Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries who have copied it. The Guyana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (GSPCA) has given its stamp of approval to this Bill by having an expert on animal welfare review it on its behalf. The Bill is a prerequisite for compliance to allow for export of animals and meat to some countries, especially the European Union (EU).

Animal welfare is directly linked to food and nutrition security. Better management of and care for livestock can improve productivity and meat quality - it ensures food safety, nutritional adequacy and food availability. For the prevention of animal diseases, the entire food chain is important, from farm to fork. Accordingly, it is seen as a prerequisite to satisfy international markets and meeting consumers' expectations.

Humane sustainable development is critical in adopting better production systems and practices, particularly as we seek to build export markets for livestock products. The future of animal production is headed towards prioritisation of environmental and animal welfare matters related to the exploitation of the different animal species. Through modernisation of our production systems, with sustainable welfare and environmental practices, we can achieve the impacts on growth, meat quality and profitability, thereby enhancing our export possibilities.

The production of safe food is a matter of shared responsibilities between all actors involved. Understanding of each other's responsibilities with effective control, monitoring and legislation provides the guarantee required through the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA).

Animal welfare is important for health, commercial and ethical reasons. For instance, one of the issues on our current health agenda is antimicrobial resistance (AMR); that is the ability of a micro-organism like bacteria, viruses and some parasites to stop an antimicrobial, such as

antibiotics, antivirals and antimalarial drugs, from working against it. As a result, standard treatments become ineffective, infections persist and may spread to others.

And it all begins with the use of antibiotics in livestock farming. Therefore, food safety, animal health and human health are connected.

This is the “One-Health” approach. But how does it all begin? Farmers have been using antibiotics as an accepted tool in the curation and prevention of animal diseases for many years, since antibiotics was the cheap, short-term answer to animal disease risks. Over time, the application of vast quantities of antibiotics in place of a structural improvement of production factors has resulted in the risks spilling over from the field of animal health to affect human health. Therefore, from the perspective of sustainability, solutions for human health concerns, a healthy environment for livestock should emphasise animal husbandry and management tools that will optimise animal health and minimise the need for antibiotics.

Poor management practices, including poor housing, overcrowding and poor nutrition, create stress on the animals, which causes diseases to become manifested, thus requiring treatment with antibiotics and an increased likelihood of antimicrobial resistance presenting itself. With proper implementation and monitoring of the provisions of this Bill, we can expect a reduction in the use of antimicrobials in the livestock and poultry production sectors.

For that reason, food safety and animal welfare issues, like antimicrobial resistance in bacterial infections, are to be taken seriously in the veterinary domain, lest it advances into the public health arena.

Animal welfare is not a new subject for legislation. Currently, there is the Animal Health Act that enlists measures to control the spread of animal borne diseases and pathogens, and Chapter 8:02 of the laws of Guyana contains penalties regarding the poisoning of fishes and maiming, injuring or killing of any terrestrial animal or bird. However, due to greater exposure to animal welfare issues, sophisticated consumer demands and growing interest in animal welfare in international trade, particularly in the European Union, there is need for an update.

Improving welfare will improve productivity and benefit home consumption and exports. Consumers in developed countries, like those in Europe, favour organic foods and methods of production that benefit animal welfare, such as free range production systems.

In Guyana, we can have a competitive advantage in agricultural trade, targeting the high-value organic market in Europe, since we have cheaper labour and an extensive land area. More so, we can enter into these markets with little to no change in our agricultural production systems because many aspects of the treatment of animals, such as adequate spacing, are already practised in Guyana. As such, this Bill intends to reform Guyana's animal welfare in a way that is synonymous with the European Union standards so as to promote trade.

As we strive to expand our livestock sector, we need to view animal welfare in a holistic way, balancing the intensification of animal production with the welfare of animals.

Through this Bill, the following are directly applicable to operators in the sector:

- New requirements for safety in transporting healthy animals.
- When using animals for transport, necessary steps will have to be taken to consider the health and safety of the animals.
- Protection of animals through adequate veterinary care, feed and water, housing and space, according to species requirements, must be provided, and ways should be devised, by the owner, to ensure minimal effort is required by the animal.
- Persons intending to keep animals for production purposes will have to register with the relevant authorities.
- Persons intending to keep animals for production purposes should take into consideration their physiological behaviour.
- Requirements for appropriate and sturdy housing for animals used for production purposes to be kept safe from adverse weather conditions and where the construction materials used are not harmful to them in any way.

2.23 p.m.

- Updated standards: the Bill introduces many technical changes, for example, the time of slaughter and care in transporting animals to be slaughtered, among others.
- The regulations that will follow concern the treatment of different species of animals. Different treatment, care and housing have to be meted out to horses, cows - both beef and dairy - pigs, sheep, goats and poultry.

This Bill gives consideration to the protection of companion/domestic animals in Guyana. The Bill includes several requirements that ensure the protection and wellbeing of domestic animals, especially with regard to their shelter, food supply and humane treatment. Pet shops and animal shelters will be regulated to ensure the safety of abandoned or lost animals whilst providing them with temporary shelter and food until an owner is found. Therefore, the construction of more animal shelters and animal pounds will also be effective in reducing the number of stray animals roaming the streets.

Stray animals pose an enormous public health risk for the spread of diseases. Guyana has to be cognisant of the increase in new and emergent diseases, such as rabies in our neighbouring countries, and the threat they pose to public health and safety. The reduction in the number of strays will lead to a reduction in the number of animal-related road fatalities as well as the number of dead animals lying on the roads and, will improve safety and will promote a cleaner and healthier environment.

This Bill seeks to reform the way animal welfare is approached in Guyana. It presents more contemporary regulations that should be followed in order to improve animal health and safety. In order to see that the provisions of this Bill are carried out and to propose ways in which the Bill may be improved, an animal welfare commission will be formed, which will see the integration of relevant experts from the disciplines of veterinary and human medicine. The commission will be responsible for achieving a comprehensive and effective animal welfare policy, dealing with matters concerning animal safety and will also serve as an advisory body to the Minister on any matters of importance. In the interim, the Animal Welfare Unit of the Guyana Livestock Development Authority will oversee the operationalisation of this Bill. Lastly, any infringements of this Bill will be rewarded with relevant penalties.

The Ministry, through the Guyana Livestock Development Authority, has and will continue to devote much attention and energy to the complex issue of animal welfare. I am grateful for the support thus far, which has certainly contributed to the progress we have made and I hope very much that our constructive dialogue will continue into the future.

The Government fully supports the introduction of this Bill. I commend this Bill to National Assembly for due consideration.

Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Seeraj: Cde. Speaker, I also want to join you in welcoming our guests to our National Assembly today and hope that their experience will be of benefit. In that regard, I will try my best, from this side of the House, to address the Bill that is before us in the context of its realism and application to our targeted group, essentially the livestock farmers, the persons involved in the wellbeing of animals, the persons involved in transporting animals, the persons involved in the processing of animals, as the Minister said, from the field to the fork.

I have had discussions with a number of persons over the past few days and up to this morning. The common thread in the discussions I have had with animal rights individuals from the Guyana Veterinary Association, the veterinary field and farmers themselves, is that this Bill appears to be simple with a cursory glance, but it is really a complex piece of legislation. This is especially so when taking into consideration that a lot of the persons I spoke with plead ignorance to any form of consultation as regards what is being proposed in this Bill. I say that with the best of intentions. This Bill should not be contentious. I would put the Minister on notice, from the onset, that we intend to move that this Bill goes to a select committee so as to benefit, fully, from the participation of the targeted groups to make this realistic.

The Minister said that this Bill was taken to Cabinet in 2014. I did some research and my source of information is pointing to the opposite. Whilst the Ministry of Agriculture started some engagement on this piece of legislation, it was not taken to Cabinet. I conclude that it was not taken there because the consultations were not completed and the feedback from the different interest groups was not completed. That is why the Bill did not come before; it was not discussed, fully, at the Cabinet level.

When one looks at the Bill, it speaks volumes about what should be done, what is in the best interest of animals, what is in the best interest of the consumers, but little is said about what is in the best interest of our livestock producers and the animals at the point where they are being produced, in the fields itself. What is being done to improve the welfare of animals at that stage? What is being done to improve the welfare of the persons who are engaged in the rearing of animals for human consumption, companionship, work purposes and so on? I say this against the background that, in a lot of areas, the physical conditions on the ground can be described, at best, as being primitive, unchanged over decades.

Up to recent times, livestock farmers in Cane Grove had cause to complain about their livestock swimming to stay afloat in flooded conditions after a few days of rainfall. I went into that area and had a discussion with a number of farmers who lamented the conditions and I saw, physically, that animals were in over four feet of water. They were saying that they made representation to the Government to have some elevated spots in the pasture to create protective areas for the animals when there is intensive rainfall which would cause flooding. There are some things which we cannot avoid but there are things we can plan and provide for. I would want to encourage the Minister to concentrate in these areas so as to give protection to the animals in the areas where they are reared, to provide the best pasturage.

The Minister recently gave approval for the increase in pasture rental from \$200 to \$1,400 without consulting livestock owners. Now we are being asked to approve a Bill in the National Assembly that is piling on the agony to livestock farmers who are not better off because conditions are not better for them and the Government seems to not be inclined to take steps to address their concerns on the ground. What is of importance to livestock rearers? It is not so much the conditions of transporting. That could be easily remedied. Adequate water could be provided whilst transporting. The Bill speaks about resting points. We are debating a Bill about resting points and, to the best of my knowledge - and I travel extensively in the agriculture areas - I have not seen the construction of any resting points anywhere along the routes farmers would use to get from their fields eventually to the abattoir or places where the animals have to be taken. We are talking about a Bill that is addressing legal requirements and the physical infrastructure is not in place to give effect to the requirements we are demanding of the farmers and the livestock owners.

It is not a case that this Bill is providing, let us say, for some amount of leniency to our agriculture producers so that, in the event of a first offence, the fine is \$5,000; second offence - \$20,000; and third offence - \$100,000. What is proposed here is a draconian fine plus imprisonment, even if one is a first-time offender. Drunken drivers are afforded leniency in terms of a first offence and we are seeking to impose draconian fines and imprisonment on livestock producers who are trying to make an honest living to provide food security for our people. How can we support such a Bill?

This Bill is pointing to a trademark by this Government of aloofness and detachment from reality, from what is on the ground. It is in isolation of reality and seems to be pointing to satisfying conditions in first world countries that we, here in a third world reality, will be hard-pressed to realise. It will be burdensome if not totally impossible for farmers and livestock producers seeking to make an honest living to go about their activities.

At Kokerit Savannah, Region 6, farmers complained bitterly about cattle rustling. We cannot stop the rustling of cattle, but we are seeking to impose more difficulties on the livestock producers by asking them to register to pay a fine, to pay huge sums of money to put in place an infrastructure to make this Bill a reality when, at the end of the day, they might not even have livestock to bring down because it is all gone. We are seeking to impose additional bureaucracy where there are existing agencies with adequate legislation which provides for animal welfare and for all the food safety measures the Minister spoke about.

I am not aware that this country has ever suffered. I know at one time the foot and mouth disease was cause for concern, but it was cause for concern because of our neighbours, particularly Brazil, where it was found. The disease, to the best of my knowledge, was never found to be here in Guyana. I am not aware that food safety, welfare of animals, biological agents and some of the things mentioned in this Bill are of concern to our consumers and livestock producers. We have been certified free of foot and mouth disease.

2.38 p.m.

We have been certified free of that. That is a major concern and it is a major requirement if we are to target export markets. Before we start talking about export, we need to first consolidate production here. We need incentives to give to our livestock producers so that we can produce,

and produce quantities and qualities, so that we can export. Right now, with one shipment to any country all the cows are finished. People are not talking about 2,000 cows. When one talks to a large importer, that importer would talk about a couple thousands of animals. The producers in Region 5, our largest livestock and crop producing region, we cannot satisfy one shipment of beef, let us say to neighbouring Venezuela. Why do we not concentrate on putting in place the conditions for us to increase our production so that we will be able to have enough animals for us to export? There are no restrictions.

What we are seeking now to do, by virtue of this Bill, without proper consultations of these persons, is to impose additional restriction and additional hardship on our farmers. While the value added tax (VAT) was reduced from 16% to 14%, it is now - 16% is not on beef - 14% on beef now and we need to have addressed that because it has to do with putting in place a regime of incentives. Of course, it is with oversight, with regulation and with enforcement, but at the end of the day what matters most is that we will have a set of legislation. We will have people trying to implement, we have a host of warnings, food analysis, handlers and wardens going to check and we would not have any animals for them to check. Everybody would pack up and go away. With the increase in the rent for pasture land a lot of people have already indicated that they would have to sell out the herd of cattle to pay one year rent and then they will have nothing to put or raise on the pasture. Some of these things are unnecessary at this current stage. We have not reached there. As I said, it would appear that we are trying to rush through this National Assembly a piece of legislation for us to reach standards to export and to reach more or less a pie in the sky situation, because when we satisfy this we will not be able, in any way, to have the animals in the qualities, in volumes, that are necessary for us to export.

Companionship animals and working animals, we express concerns about these things. From time to time, during the course of travelling along our roadways in the countryside, you would have observed conditions that are not the best and it leaves a lot to be desired, in terms of welfare. What we need to do is to exam whether this is done on a systematic basis, whether it is a one-off occurrence. For some reason or the other, it is whether the plight of a companion animal, a working animal, or an animal that is raised for eventual consumption, at that particular point in time, is the *modus operandi* or it is a one-off situation.

For example, drought situation, there was El *Nino* conditions in 1996. It was there again, I think, in 2006 where the farmers had to go about and tried to keep animals alive, and some suffered. They were dead due to lack of water. Will you fine and imprison a livestock owner when he tried his best but it was physically impossible for him to provide water for his animals and feed for his animals in drought-like conditions? I will more or less think that you will fine or imprison someone who deliberately, when alternatives can be found, but alternative were not pursued to, make or put the animal in a comfortable state, sociologically, physiologically, and otherwise, and if the alternative were available then you can move towards imposing fines, warning, and all of that.

I would want to ask, what kind of educational programmes were done? Some of these things are even new to me when I was going through then, and I have been in agriculture production all my life. I grow up as a farmer; I went to school based on earnings from farming. We need to educate our people. We need to make them part and parcel of this process of development. We do not need to isolate them and to impose upon them without due notice and without them being a part of the process, without them being aware of what is required of them to give effect into the Bill. Yet, we are moving towards bring a piece of legislation here to impose on our people measures which I sum up as being draconian, in the least, offences that people are not even aware they will be committing. We need to make people aware that if you do this, then this is not right. There are things that we do naturally to protect animals. There are things that we do as a way of life. There are things that we do because we grew up in that situation, first of all, go towards the protection and the comfort of that which is under our care. We do not need a Bill to tell us that.

A companion animal, if it is not in a good state of mind, if it is not in a good physical shape, will not be a companion animal that one will want to be associated with. There is actual tendency for owners of companion animals to do that which is right by their companion animal.

Working animals, I have seen some horse cart owners... Now there is a big fine for them if they do not put a licence on the cart written in black on a white background or written in white against a black background. When I pass there are a lot of horse cart owners who take pride in the condition and who takes pride in taking care of their animals. On some Sundays, you will see them grooming, and exhibiting their animals. They do not need to be told that because it comes naturally to them. This is their pride. This is what they make a living on and if the animal is not

well it will take them three times or four times the hours to move from point 'A' to point 'B' to deliver some lumber a few sacks of cement, or steel rod, or something such as that. It is in their interest. We do not need a piece of legislation to tell them that we would fine you \$100,000 and put you in prison for 4 months if you do not give the horse some water. If the man does not feed the animal and do not take care of it, he does not have bread on his table. He is out of business. He is out of livelihood. His children will starve. [Dr. Persaud: Who is going to take care

of the parking?] Now, that is another story too. I do not know whether parking for horse cart is the \$57 or \$58 for 15 minutes, an additional burden piling on the agony on our ordinary people out there.

Sir, we are talking about animal, the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA), there is the Wildlife Conservation Commission, for a piece of legislation. Now, there will be an Animal Welfare Commission. On top of that, it is another bureaucracy to be funded by taxpayers, and to be funded livestock owners. Where are they going to get all this money from? They would have to fill up forms; they have to keep registers, and some of these people cannot read and write. It is not to, in any way, be demeaning because I know some people who cannot read and write but they still deserve their PhD in the field of their work. I do not know to read and write, so education is not necessarily academic.

An Amerindian in the Amazon Basin, Upper Essequibo, for example, Rewa, Apoteri or Monkey Mountain, if he is bitten by a snake and there is no snake bite kit, with his local knowledge he would be saved. You are saved by a person who cannot read and write. In no way, I mean to be demeaning. Some of our owners of livestock, the forms that they would be required to fill out they would have to employ someone to fill it out, such as lawyer or justice of peace. They will have to hire someone now to fill up a form to apply for a licence to transport an animal from point 'A' to point 'B', which they have always been doing, 50 kilometres. As you know, Sir, the coastline is over 350 kilometres and people move animals from Region 6 to Georgetown abattoir. This thing was put in a restriction of 50 kilometres. What we will do there is that we will have to find a resting point. I hope the Minister will construct a few if he seeks to go ahead with this, constructing them for overnighting and providing care, and all of that. Then, the transporter will be in breach of this legislation.

A few centuries ago we moved cattle from Lethem across the old cattle trail right up into Berbice. It took months. Those people were not affected by any piece of legislation. They were driving the cattle through and feeding them as they go along because ultimately the amount that arrived at their destination would have determined how much they would have had in the pocket. Here in this modern era we are seeking to impose on our livestock owners who are seeking to move their livestock from point A to point B. if they engage the services of a transporter, you are imposing, by this piece of legislation, a limit. This is not Barbados or Antigua or where you are travelling four kilometres and then you are in the ocean. This is Guyana. We are on the main land of 214,000 square kilometres or in the old days you would say, I think, it is 83,000 square miles.

We cannot seek in any way to impose or cut and paste. When I went through this Bill I get the distinct impression that there was a lot of cut and pasting going on. Somebody went on the internet, on to Google, downloaded something and said that it sound good, let us put it in here. It comes in here without taking our reality into consideration. [*Interruption*] If a livestock producer should seek...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you must allow the Hon. Member to make his statement. We cannot hear him if everyone seeks to speak at the same time. Please proceed.

Mr. Seeraj: Sir, we cannot seek to impose this kind of restriction on a farmer in Mibikuri who seeks to engage the services of a transporter to travel to Georgetown with 20 heads of cattle. There are already restrictions in terms of the time of movement for animals. Luckily, with the Berbice River Bridge, we can overcome that restriction, in terms of the time to get from point 'A' to point 'B', let us say to Georgetown to Mibikuri abattoir. What we will not be able to overcome is the distance. You cannot constrict the roadways, the highways. As a matter of a fact, we have to expand them.

2.53 p.m.

We cannot constrict a 160 kilometres into 50 kilometres and what you are going to do here, now, is to make four trips now into a two-day journey, where there has to be additionally provision for the welfare of the animals under our care.

Sir, you know, I would want to encourage the Minister to look at this business of cattle rustling because it is a deterrent to our ability to produce. I mentioned earlier the Kokerit Savannah. The Minister, I think, is aware of some of the conditions that cattle, especially, grow up under. Sir, in this particular instance, it is a deterrent to our livestock producers at the field level without us going through all of this to arrive to our market in Buckingham, or wherever is the case. It has to do also with the welfare of the animal when it is taken illegally out of the control of the grower.

We have seen some people moving away from livestock production in zone, designated areas full of livestock, production not because they do not want to raise animals, but it is because of the rustling problem. It is easy to move the animals. It is much more difficult to steal the crop and that is why we had a lot of difficulties with zoning and the implementation of zoning when a livestock producer is unable to continue with livestock production because of rustling, move into producing a crop in an area that is designated for livestock and is faced with a lot of difficulties. Of course, it will be other cattle coming into the area and then there is the Government regulation coming in and saying that this is not an area that is zoned for crop. There is an additional burden on the services because in the development of our service network, especially for drainage, because irrigation is a bit easier to handle for livestock and crop. Drainage is much more difficult because there is the high intensity of rainfall which affects the ability to drain the land.

Now, when livestock producers are forced to do away with their livestock or their livestock is all taken away from them illegally and they go towards a crop, the service demand or the demand on the service would be elevated and burdened the capacity to provide for the drainage and irrigation, and then it could be deemed illegal. I am certain the Ministry of Public Security is aware of reports of rustling where animals are thrown into the Canje River and they go through what is called bloating. They fill their lungs with air just to stay afloat and they are tied by the rustler as logs to float down the Canje River. This Bill should seek to address the welfare of those animals that are moved in those kinds of conditions when they are rustled. It is all well and good to come up with Bills. The practicality of it and the implementation aspect of it is what we have to be bothered with and...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for over 25 minutes.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you Comrade Speaker. I am wrapping up. I would want to put on the record that the fines are draconian. There is no way it is structured to take into consideration whether it is a first time offender, whether it was an offence that was committed without people being aware of it. I know that we would argue that ignorance of the law is no excuse and all of that, but at least with new things, there needs to be an awareness process, so that our farmers and livestock producers would be aware of what is demanded of them.

I want to close by saying that this Bill warrants... This is not my opinion alone. This is also because I had, as I said up to this morning, some discussion with people in the field. I would like to propose on this side of the honourable House that this Bill be taken to a Special Select Committee for us to engage wider public discourse and have the input of all our people while simultaneously we share awareness, an educational programme targeting our producers.

I want to thank you very much Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Adams: I rise to lend my support to the Bill standing in the name of the Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Noel Holder. Lest this nation being misguided, the Bill, which we are now debating, we inherited it from the Opposition and one wonders why the very comments being proffered now by the previous speaker were of no concern to the Government then.

I cannot help but to over emphasise the importance of the Animal Welfare Bill and I would contain my presentation to the welfare of animals. I may remind this honourable House that Guyana with our 83,000 square miles boasts to having the largest jaguar, the largest eagle, the largest anteater, the largest otter, and many such animals. Therefore I am of the firmest believe that the time has come for us not only to pass enact legislation that speaks to the welfare of animals, but for us to ensure that these legislation are being enforced. It is an undisputed fact that there is very little or sometimes no consideration for animals.

We see on a daily basis in society the way animals are being treated by their owner. A good example is the horse-drawn cart, which my very friend referred to earlier, which plays an integral part of our culture. It transports tons of lumber. If we go to Lombard Street, right now, we would see that the horses are buckling under the amount of weight they have to carry. Sometimes they could barely carry the weight; sometimes they are whipped to carry the weight. Therefore this Bill is a welcome one at this time. We will be judged as a country by the way we treat our

animals, whether they are pets that some persons lock in a cage and leave to starve or some when they grow old we stray them into another village. This does not represent the caring nature of our Guyanese people.

In this very honourable House we heard from previous and present Minister of Tourism, of gains we would derive from environmental tourism. We heard of persons birdwatching. We have seen persons coming to our country just to see the varieties of birds and animals that we have, therefore, the necessity for this Bill becomes imperative since there are poor animal welfare control impacts negatively on tourism. In the world of trade, governments have taken positions as it relates to the well-being of animals.

Over the years we have seen several initiatives that were implemented to curb the negative behaviour meted out to our animals. The European Union (EU), for that matter, will not trade in animals or animal products with any country that has no animal welfare legislation in place. It brings to bear the concern as to how the animals are kept and the way they are treated, the stress and inhumane slaughtered. This concern does not only apply to the EU bloc of countries but also to other overseas departments.

This Bill seeks to enhance animal health and traceability of livestock products. We as legislators today, giving our consent to the passage of this Bill, are demonstrating our appreciation of companion and all other animals and it would certainly bring about more awareness about their welfare.

I have no hesitation in commending this Bill to the House for passage. [*Applause*]

Mr. Neendkumar: I rise to address several pertinent issues regarding the Animal Welfare Bill, Bill No. 21 of 2016 published in the *Official Gazette* in November, 2016 and tabled in the House, now, for the second reading. I wish to comment by stating unequivocally that we on this side of the House are not opposed to an improved, constructive and meaningful regularisation of issues related to animal welfare in Guyana. We are not opposed to that.

Notwithstanding the measures we put into law, we must do so with an approach that impact positively on our economy and citizens while achieving acceptable standards. While some people have been saying that this Bill is our Bill, let make it quite clearer that this Bill is not the

original Bill and we look at the penalties to this and the offences it show clearly that the penalties and offences just wants to continue in the way to get more tax to feed the fat cats over there. That is what they want, to get money.

Only this morning I overheard they were saying that they would clamp the horse and donkey hooves. Yes, that is what the mayor and city council wants to do, right. I do not know what brutality this would bring. I wish to say that the 14% tax on water and electricity would definitely affect the animals because they would get less water to drink. In essence, we must not impose measures for the sake of trying to copycat, what seemingly has been adopted in other economies, but that they are reasonably transcend to the improvements and also reflect our internal ideals and customs. Impartially, the measures must not be too unrest for our people while being easily understood.

The proposed Bill in its current form contains too many subjective provisions and onerous enforcement penalties to deal with any relevant matters in plural or a nationally way. I would immediately call on the Hon. Members of this honourable House to approve sending this Bill to the relevant special parliamentary Committee for review in order for the subject to issue be given much more comprehensive and meaningful consideration. That was the purpose of the draft Bill that our Comrades over there inherited. I say this because having read this Bill and without the corresponding regulation that would signal the possible approach to implementation, I could provide many justifications as not only to the stupidity of the many of the measures and lack of practicality in the implementation, but the immediate inconsistent balance with other legislation enforce as well as the onerous impacts in many cases. I will provide a few as follows.

First this legislation treats human beings, as me and you, as animals while this biology or zoology classification may be generally acceptable, the penalty case for offences among humans are not equal or similar. One example in this respect is the position in our Summary Jurisdiction Act, Chapter 8:02 which in the case of the offence of assault subjective provides, section 21:

“Everyone who unlawfully assaults any person shall be liable to a fine of not less than five thousand dollars nor more than ten thousand dollars or to imprisonment for six months.”

3.08 p.m.

While in the case of aggravated assault section 22 states:

“Where anyone is convicted of an assault upon any person, and the assault is, in the opinion of the court, of such an aggravated nature that it cannot be sufficiently punished under the last preceding section, the offender shall be liable to a fine of not less than seven thousand five hundred dollars nor more than fifteen thousand dollars or to imprisonment for eighteen months.”

The general offence clause at 38 of this Animal Welfare Bill states:

“Where no penalty is provided for an offence committed under this Act, such offence upon summary conviction is punishable by a fine of sixty thousand dollars and imprisonment for four months.”

This is very inhumane to mankind. Are the Government and the Minister saying that there must be a stronger deterrent for assaulting cats, dogs, pigs, rats, horses and donkeys, than human beings? Is this what they are saying? This is what they are saying here. If so, this is one of the reasons why all accept this Government as associating our economy with the term ‘donkey cart’ economy. We must have a balance on our decisions and law in particular must reflect this. It must reflect this.

Secondly, the obligation to render assistance at clause 6 of the Bill is deficient in content. I hope the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs is listening, I still think that he is the Minister of Home Affairs. Amendments are required to protect citizens or persons who may happen to cause injuries to an animal but are themselves injured. The Bill in its current format harshly renders such persons liable to a penalty of \$50,000. Further, it is irrational that a person who may accidentally cause injury and fail to render assistance should do so because such person has to prioritise his own health which also comes at a cost. Such persons may also not have the wherewithal or the finance to make any arrangements given the survival mode in the Guyana context. Things are really bad in Guyana, let us face it. He or she should therefore not be considered to have created an offence and the cost of assistance where practical should be borne by the state when properly notified. This section in particular should be amended by the use of the term “as far as practicable in such circumstances” because it is simply make sense.

Thirdly, the term “humane killing” is a subjective misnomer that could be avoided. In my view there is nothing humane about killing. However, it is defined in clause 2 of the Bill as meaning:

“a procedure performed by using tools and methods approved for such purpose and a manner which causes the animal a minimum of pain, suffering and fear.”

I can recognise an animal in distress, but I do not know how fear or pain could be practicably measured in an animal. What is this we are hearing here? Where are we, in which part of the world? Is it in Europe? This is to the extent that one may be prosecuted for causing such. Perhaps this can be explained by the Hon. Minister, please Minister. However, one interpretation of meaning outlined for humane killing implies that the animal should be killed as quickly as possible. We have customarily killed animals for food using varying implements over time and using different customary practices.

The issue of special tools and procedures is one of various personal considerations that cannot be easily standardised. I think here of my Amerindian brothers and sisters as well as those persons who hunt for food. I visualise that such persons will have to do what is necessary to capture the animal and under the current Bill they could be jailed. They could be jailed! For them, it is either going hungry or turning a vegetarian. My point here is that the content of the proposed Bill is not sufficient in scope and does not cater for the customary survival methods of many of our people.

[**Mr. Damon:** Mr. Allicock, you cannot eat meat anymore.] Yes, Hon. Vice-President, you have to be careful.

Fourthly, clause 27 (2) of the Bill states:

“A person shall not sell companion animals to persons under the age of eighteen years.”

As far as I am aware, there is no limitation to the need for protection offered by some animals. The time when one may become incapacitated to the extent that the dog can assist or in the need for companionship which fits in the meaning assisted in clause (2) of this Bill. From where I grew up, I personally bought, owned and took care of cows and other animals since I was 12 years of age. If the intent is to ensure the animal would be treated in an acceptable way, the Bill should allow for the complementary connective responsibility of some other connected adult as an inclusion in this clause. Under the circumstances, it is fortunate that the Bill does not state that

a person under the age of 18 cannot own a companion animal received as a gift. If the intent is otherwise, it is making no sense. I do not know where we are heading. What is being implied by this section is deficient and certainly not well thought out.

Fifthly, clause 19 (3) of this Bill requires any person who wishes to keep an animal for production purposes to register with the Guyana Livestock Development Authority which is the administrative authority. Is it production of offspring, food, milk, manure or to aid in some other productive capacity? Let them tell us because I have a dog and it drops three puppies then do I have to go through the process to register? Think about this thing Minister, think about this thing. Can I not mind a dog anymore? I love my dog; I love my pets.

At the same time clause 39 (2) (a) provides for the Minister to prescribe:

“...the form of an application, other form or document, and fees to be charged by the competent authority;”

Every countryside household in Guyana will be required to register or they will be committing an offence. If you are minding two ‘yard’ fowls, you have to register them; if you minding cats, you have to register them; if you are minding dogs, you have to register them. Where are we going? Do we have to get taxpayer identification number (TIN)? Remember when you lost your TIN certificate or something is wrong you have to pay \$5,000 for it. They in any case should be liable to also pay \$60,000 even if they reside in the bushes. If you do not register, you have to pay \$60,000 even if it is in any part of the interior. Minister, it is to think about this thing.

It is just another backward bureaucratic measure to further burden the poor people in this country. They may also have to bear travelling costs to reach a registration office. I see this as just another impudent imposition that will allow persons to be targeted selectively. Another contentious issue, with this Bill, relates to the introduction of some specific conditions regarding the transportation of animals, which must be reviewed. On the surface, clause 11 (1) to (5) set out some seemingly acceptable conditions to be observed by transporters of animals but among these is the use of approved transporters which practically set up persons to be fleeced if they cannot immediately meet the standard set out. Concurrently subsection (6) invokes the squeeze by including a mandatory 50 kilometres, which is 31 miles limit, from any holding on farmers using their own vehicles to transport their animals. Subsection (6) of the Bill states:

“Notwithstanding anything in this section to the contrary, a farmer may be using his own vehicle to transport his own animal for not more than fifty kilometres from any holding.”

This is really sick.

I contend that currently Guyana does not have a sufficient or adequate infrastructure to support this imposition. We have legislation in place to impound stray and unattended animals which to the larger extent allows for the animals to be caught and impounded at police stations across the country. However, I will not hesitate to mention that at most of these stations there is inadequately trained staff to attend to these demands that this measure brings and that will be further intensified under this Bill. Many of us have witnessed the most inhumane treatment to animals at these locations, as such it is easy to conclude that the Government must first address these matters before it attempts to impose. You have to address it.

Many stations you would go to you would see cows, donkeys and horses, and you will be seeing sheer bones in them when impounded. They die in there. Are we going to continue? The Government is guilty of the cattle hassle. The Government – you are impounding them and killing them. You are starving them now, and you cannot even buy water to give them. You cannot buy water. There is no electricity, so people are coming and stealing them now, because they are not lighting up the place. What is being created here is a formula for harassment. The impact envisaged is that on many days there shall be long queues of cattle trucks lined up on the roadside at several police stations and outposts, not to mention the significant increases of beef and other meat products. This will go up. I challenge the Minister to update this House on any meaningful mechanism that is in place or that could be put in place in the medium term. To complement his position, in Berbice, cattle, sheep, goat and pig farmers would have to stop five times to get to the abattoir in Georgetown, not to mention the harassment, *Comrade Prakash, when dem boys thirsty*. I also wish to ask the Hon. Minister, what happens when the trained person at the holding centres is responsible for losses and deaths of animals?

It also stated about a commission. The Commissioner enforcer asks at this juncture if there is a plan to have any building assigned to house this commission. I say this because almost two years after the necessary legislation for the constitutionally approved Local Government Commission was passed and assented by the President, this Government is still searching for a building.

Further I am reliably informed that the Hon. Minister already has a set of paid advisers and we have been asked to consider in this Bill a set of unacceptable measures. When is this commission going to be put in place? When will you put it if you cannot put the Local Government Commission which this whole House supported already? You are creating so many problems for the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) to function. When will you put this commission in place? Minister, please tell us. Finally, clause 40 of this Bill posits that:

“This Act shall be in addition to and not in derogation of any other law relating to offences prescribed in this Act in relation to animals”.

It simply means more measures that we reasonably have to contend with, measures that will decrease profitability and encourage selective targeting, more fees that will be a disincentive to cottage industries, growth and development. That will happen, more fees, people will stop. People will not want to mind anything anymore. This is what will happen. Minister of Agriculture please do not allow your friends to give you a basket, you are doing a good job. Tell them this thing cannot work - tell them this.

3.23 p.m.

While, I have only mentioned a few areas, this Bill is inundated with shortcomings that will certainly derogate from the promised “good life”. I am certain that if the Government’s side of this House chooses to not take cognisance and rush this Bill through, the people, at some point, will demonstrate their understanding through protests like we are having in Georgetown and the other forms of non-acceptance. Until the matters are prudently addressed, once again, I urge Members to send this Bill to a Parliamentary Special Select Committee, where it could be properly revised and looked at.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Public Health [Dr. Cummings]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give my support for the Animal Welfare Bill No. 21/2016, which comprehensively addresses the intrinsic need for the protection of animals in our society.

According to the One Health Paradigm, humans, animals and the environment are inextricably linked. Of significance is that, humans and animals depend on each other in innumerable ways. From time in memorial, the connection between humans and animals has been one of the most fundamental bonds that human beings experience. Powerful and mutually beneficial bonds continue today with people and animals being connected in ways that are essential to the health and well-being of both. One essential aspect of this bond is keeping the world's population well-nourished and healthy through a wholesome and sustainable supply of beef, poultry, dairy products and eggs.

Another aspect is the bond between humans their animal companions, as well as working animals, from household pets, to horses, to herd livestock, to therapy dogs that provide comfort to victims of disasters and illnesses. The lives of both humans and animals are made better by our mutual bond.

We, on the Government's side, recognise that the time for modern animal welfare policies is long overdue in Guyana. As we move towards the future, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the passage of this essential Animal Welfare Bill No. 21 will result in Guyana embracing contemporary policies and internationally recognised best practices. The resulting programmes will speak to the availability of wholesome food and fresh water, coupled with essential veterinary care, proper handling, socialisation and, more importantly, the enhancement of the environment which animals occupy.

This Animal Welfare Bill No. 21/2016 has been drafted in line with the internationally recognised and accepted five freedoms of animal welfare. The five freedoms are as follows: (1) Freedom from hunger and thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour; (2) freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area; (3) freedom from pain, injury or disease by prevention of or rapid diagnosis and treatment; (4) freedom to express normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of animals' own kind; and (5) freedom from fear and distress by showing conditions and treatment which avoid mental and physical suffering.

This is an important Bill, so it is imperative that this noble Assembly and august body pass this Animal Welfare Bill No. 21 so that animal carriers, handlers, dealers, breeders and exhibitors, in

addition to research laboratories, can be governed by legislation that sets out the minimum standards of care that must be provided for animals, including housing, handling, sanitation, food, water, veterinary care and protection from weather extremes.

This Bill aims to do a number of things. First of all, it intends to promote and protect the welfare, safety and health of animals. Secondly, it will ensure the proper and humane care and management of animals in accordance with generally accepted standards. Further, it will reflect the community's expectation that people in charge of animals will ensure that the animals are properly treated and cared for. Three of the 17 sustainable Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) speak to good health and well-being, life below water and life on land. Because, as I mentioned earlier, there is a bond between humans and animals, it is very important that some regulation be put in place to protect animals from adversities caused directly or indirectly by humans. This Animal Welfare Bill No. 21 must become law so as to provide the legal framework for ensuring that all animals in Guyana have appropriate standards of care. Animal welfare is linked to human health.

The nine sections of this Bill cover the wide gamut of animal welfare for the protection of various classes of animals. The keeping of animals from production purposes to animal shelters, and the necessary penalties to be enforced should there be any contravention of this Bill. One area that has very serious public health implications could be found in Part V of the Bill: "The keeping of animals used for production purposes"

Clause 22 speaks to: "Feeding and watering". I will quote from clause 22, sub-section (1):

"22. (1) A person who cares for an animal shall ensure that the type, quality and quantity of feed provided to that animal is appropriate to the species, age and physiological needs of animal."

It is here that the Animal Welfare Commission, as stated in Part IV.

"Must pay close attention to the types of feed used by famers for animals kept for production purposes, to ensure that there is not an abuse of growth enhancers, steroids and antibiotics".

Anti-microbial resistance is a real and present danger that Guyana can ill afford to deal with at this point in time. Therefore, it is imperative that careful attention is paid to all types of feed given to animals as well as the medication used on animals allotted for production purposes. Research has shown that antibiotics have been effective in improving the rate and efficiency of gain and swine and cattle and poultry. The responses in poultry and swine are generally greater in younger animals than in those reaching the end of the growing-finishing period. There is some evidence that improved farrowing rate of swine is associated with the use of antibiotics. Responses in cattle have not been as great as those in swine and poultry. There is also considerable debate in veterinary medicine regarding the use of antibiotics in animals raised for human consumption – food animals. The potential threat to human health, resulting from inappropriate antibiotic use in food animals, is significant, as pathogenic resistant organisms propagated in these livestock are poised to enter the food supply and could be widely disseminated in food products. Therefore, when the Bill becomes law, the Animal Welfare Commission must recognise that it is now critical that agricultural use of antibiotics be recognised as one of the major contributors to the development of resistant organisms, that result in life threatening human infections, and is included as part of its strategy to control the mounting the public health crisis of antibiotic resistance.

Regulating the nutritional quality of feed fed to animals to be produced for human consumption, will ultimately give better nutritional quality of meat, leading to better nutrition for the Guyanese population. People who have close contact with large numbers of animals such as farmers, abattoir workers, sharers, knackery workers and veterinarians, are at a considerable higher risk of contracting a zoonotic disease. Members of the wider community are also at risk of contracting zoonosis that can be transmitted by family pets. Occasionally, infection such as listeriosis from drinking unpasteurised milk can also occur through indirect contact with other animals or leptospirosis from contact with infected urine that has contaminated streams or ponds. Some people are more susceptible to contracting a zoonotic disease due to their immune status. For example, people who are on immunosuppressive or suppressive treatment, pregnant women, alcoholics and diabetics are at severe risks. It is very important to note that zoonosis may be contracted from both ill and apparently healthy animals.

This Animal Welfare Bill No.21/2016, explicitly speaks to the proper way to keep animals. Enforcing the various aspect of this Bill will ensure that, in moving forward, animals in Guyana are kept according to established guidelines.

As I conclude, it is very important and necessary that this Animal Welfare Bill comes at a time when the world is becoming more aware of the need to focus on the link between human and animal health. Efforts should be concentrated on minimising the transmission of all food-borne pathogens, regardless of their antibiotic susceptibility by insistence on good hygiene practices on farms, in abattoirs, during the distribution and marketing of food, in food preparation and, finally, by the consumer. The various components of this Bill speak to each of the areas identified.

Guyana must join with its international partners to ensure that the welfare of animals is made a priority. Whether one looks at the Bill from a cursory glance, as my Friend across there, or from a complex level, I am calling on you, us collectively, to support the Animal Welfare Bill No. 21/2016 that seeks to provide a safe environment for animals so that all persons, living in Guyana, will have access to both healthy food and a safe environment.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Croal: Mr. Speaker, I rise, like the previous two speakers on this side of the House, to provide our comments and our remarks with respect to the Animal Welfare Bill 2016. I must assure the Government and Minister Cummings that our opinions on this Bill are not for opposing sake. In fact, the intention of the Animal Welfare Bill is laudable. However, our concerns include the consultative process in which this Bill was brought, prior, to the House. Much has been said by the two previous speakers on the Government's side that the Bill was a People's Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C's) Government Bill.

This Bill, while the original drafting was done at the level of the Ministry of Agriculture then, was never brought to the level of Cabinet or to the subcommittee level of the Cabinet. So it is not accurate to say that it was the PPP/C's Government Bill. [**Mr. Holder:** There was a draft.] Yes. There was a draft. A Bill must start from somewhere.

3.38 p.m.

However, references have even been made about export and the intention of this Bill, because while there are other Bills that address aspects about exports in respect to animals, for example there is the Food and Drug Act, this Bill, as is said and as in the obvious name, also looks at the protection and health. It also looks at the prevention of cruelty to animals, which is much needed, whether it is domestic animals, animals in the wild, companion animals, *et cetera*.

In addition to what has been said by the Hon. Members, Mr. Seeraj as well Mr. Needkumar, I probably want to identify some specifics within the Bill for which we would like to register our concerns. But from the onset, I would like to say that we are requesting that this Bill be sent to a Parliamentary Select Committee for consideration. Yes. The Bill is welcomed and we would not want to stymie the efforts of the Bill. But what sending this Bill to the Parliamentary Special Select does is, it allows for us to have broad-based input and to have as much sectoral representation to the end users out there. For example, if one was to look at the interpretation, recommendation and the definition of service animals, as have been given about horses and other animals, in Guyana's context, inclusive of animals, there are also donkeys being used in service. So we may want to look at expanding this definition to probably include horses, cows, donkeys, and then we can say other animals.

Then on page seven, section four, it speaks of the Protection of Animals, under subsection 2(D), reference is made about the inciting or training of animals, *et cetera*, under the supervision of qualified persons. But no mention has been made about it being referred to with respect to qualified persons. Having recognised the limitations which we have in our country, some clarification and much more input on training, *et cetera*, would be required. If one would look at sub section (2) (g),

“(g) use of technical devices, aids and tools aimed at controlling behaviour of animals...”

May I ask, in general, how do we deal with the aspect about the whipping of horses during horse racing, rodeo, and I see Minister Allicock smiling? How do we deal with this? These are some of the things that need to be address too. Racing in general, because it is not only confined to rodeo, in fact, there is some illegal horseracing on the roads too.

Part II, clause 6, “Obligation to render assistance.” The question arises under subsection one, as to how we deal with vehicular accidents that involve horse carts drawn around the city, *et cetera*. So I would ask say that more clarity be given with respect to this subsection.

Then if we talk about the protection of animals during transport – clause 11, subsection 3 (b),

“the animals must be fit for the journey;”

But much more clarity and explanation is required as to what, and may be who, would determine and what are the determinants that state which animal is fit to be taken from one point to the next and to be taken to the rest houses, which we will speak of shortly.

If one would look at subsections 3(h) and 4, references have been made to resting, resting points and the persons handling the animals at the assembly centre or resting points to be trained. I merged those because I asked the question, therefore: Are the human resource and infrastructure that we have in our country ready for the implementation of these provisions? Think about the logistical nightmare. If one would move further to subsection 6, “a farmer may use his own vehicle to transport his own animal for not more than 50 kilometres”, which is approximately 31 miles, from any holding. This Bill seems to be an urban or a Georgetown-coastal oriented Bill. So it ignores the many challenges and issues that we are confronted and faced with as a country, in terms of the geographical space in which we exist and many of the hinterland challenges. Even the challenges of cattle raising and cattle rustling, whether in the Rupununi, the movement of animals to be slaughtered or even from one owner to the next, hence, placing more burden on the owners and the end consumers. But the question is asked, why the restriction to 50 kilometres? This will severely impact our farmers, more particularly our cattle farmers, in a wide cross section of our country. I think the previous two speakers, from our side, would have touched on this, so I will move on.

If we look at Part III: “Protection at the time of slaughter or humane killing”. Clause 15 speaks of the handling of animals in slaughterhouses. But the question can be asked here, how do we protect the livelihoods of small butchers who slaughter cows, sheep and goats, and how do we cater for the wild meat industry? So I beg the question Hon. Minister. This needs to be addressed.

Moving on, under Part III, clause 16, which speaks about the slaughtering and humane killing, in subsection (2), reference is made about trained persons. “Animals may be moved, *et cetera*, or humanely killed only by persons who are trained to perform these tasks.” How will we determine and how will we go about doing this? The underlying point I wish to make is that, while in my introduction, I said that it is very much a good intention in this Bill, we must be cognisant of our local scenario and situation as a country.

So, who are the trained persons, we ask? If one would move on to subsection (3),

“...slaughtering for private domestic consumption shall ensure that the animals be slaughtered in a way as to spare the animals any unnecessary pain...”

Yes. We agreed. But the question asked here is: How will the relevant authority implement this section or the provision? How will this be done? Remember, we are referring to private domestic consumption.

Subsection (5), refers to slaughtering, according to religious rights, in an approved slaughter house. Again, if we look at the local context and we are aware that, for certain religious purposes, there is slaughtering taking place at the place of worship, for example Ramadan at the Mosque. And I am told that even at the Kali churches sacrifices are done that involves sheep and goats. This section needs to be relooked because, with these provisions, how are we going to be affected; how will this be done? It is because, as it states, “in approved slaughter houses”.

Part IV, speaks about the Animal Welfare Commission. Clause 17 speaks about the establishment and the composition of the Commission. Having looked at the recommendation, while reference has been made to experts for various...and this composition of the Commission - reference has been made from various technical disciplines. In fact, I have checked them out and there are about six technical disciplines that have been mentioned to be comprised on the Commission. It is my humble opinion that more consideration should be made for representation to be done at the other head of the spectrum, that is, representation by the owners, herders, representation of the people who are directly affected and involved.

Then as part of the Commission, reference is made for a representation from the animal protection associations. While no reference has been made as to how they will derive this

representative, the point that I would like to bring out is that the case can be made for there to be more than one representatives from the animal protection associations. So I would urge the Hon. Minister to relook this.

In light of clause 16, subsection (5), as I mentioned earlier, when I referred to, where for religious persons slaughtered animals, the case can be made for the Commission to comprise of a representative from the religious groups affected.

Then it referred to the Animal and Welfare Commission, the functions outlined in the Bill can be described as ambiguous and yet, the authority referred to is the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA), which is done under the GLDA Act, and the competent authority for this aspect is the Animal Health Unit. So there needs to be further clarity in this regard.

If we move on to Part V, clause 19 refers to the “Principles for the keeping of animals”. Under this broad section of the keeping of animals used for production purposes, the question could be asked, how does this affects the small farmer or the small pheasant businesses, where people do reproduction at a small level and where slaughtering takes place on a small scale? Even if one would refer to subsection 4, under clause 19, reference is made to persons who keep animal for the production purposes. Again, what kind of training are we referring to?

3.53 p.m.

What would be the determinants for one or what would be the qualification for one to determine to have experience in the caring for such animals? The question could be asked. Clause (20): “Care of ill or injured animals”. Subsection (1):

“An owner shall, without delay, care for any animal which shows signs of illness...ensure that the animal receives veterinary attention.”

While this statement may be true, the question could be asked, again, because of our locality, how feasible is this?

Clause 26, which refers to “Records”, subsections (1) and (2), “responsibility of the owner” with respect to record keeping. Reference has been made up to a year, *et cetera*. But more clarity

under this subsection needs to be provided. There need to be more clarification and input in terms of stating exactly what else is required.

Clause 27, “Protection of companion animals” The speaker before me, on this side of the House, would have referred to this, but a case could be made here, under subsections (4) and (5), since there will be persons, for example, who are physically challenged and they may have a dog, *et cetera*, to guide and help them. So, they will have an animal that is kept for companion, protection or assistance. So, how are those persons who are blind or physically challenged, for example, children, *et cetera*, how are they being addressed in this case? Will we punish the blind for not being able to comply with these subsections?

Part VII, clause 33, “Animal Shelters”. This section, which speaks about the animal shelters, in my humble opinion, is impractical. This section is not implementable. The questions could be asked again, are these shelters going to be required to be everywhere in the country? And knowing where we are at, how far are we removed from this practicality? There is a lot of infrastructure, as well as technical input that would be required to make this practical.

In general, in terms of the penalties, and much has been said about the draconian nature of our penalties... In fact, four sections or references have been made for penalties. In Part II, clause 4, subsection (4), which refers to the “Protection of animals”, the fine is \$100,000 and “...to imprisonment for six months.”

Then we move on to Part II, clause 5, which refers to the “Protection of animals while kept or raised, again, the fine is \$50,000 and to imprisonment for three months.

The reference is also made to Part II, clause 6, “Obligation to render assistance”, a fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for three months.”

Then there is a general proviso for where there has been no mention of penalties for an offence committed, the fine is \$60,000 and to imprisonment for four months.

As was said by the Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj, these penalties are onerous. And apart from the section, persons are being penalised with a fine and then there will also be the introduction of jail penalty. Where is the separation for persons who are first time offenders’ verses repeaters?

So, this Bill will see the introduction or creation of more bureaucracy, which includes, as was mentioned, the registration of pet shops, zoological parks, *et cetera*.

I want to conclude... [Mr. Patterson: Please do.] It is not a laughing matter, but I want to conclude that, while, yes, we have a Bill that is something that we could start and work on. I want to conclude that the additional burdens on our people, taking into consideration all that is happening at our national level, we will see much more bureaucracy and this is something we would not want in this system. So, I therefore call that this Bill be referred to the Parliamentary Special Select Committee to garner much more input from consultations. I have been told, at the Ministry level, it would have had input at, I think, it was placed at one time on the Ministry's website and there would have been some initial comments there. [Ms. Teixeira: Two.] Two comments, I am told.

Mr. Speaker, you would recognise and as the Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj stated, the complexity of this Bill. While it appears very simple, among the things that are being touched on and the areas that are much needed for our country, I may add, we ask that it be referred to a Special Select Committee. This is because we can have much more injections in the gaps that are not only identified here, but that others on the outside could see. Such a mechanism, will allow, for example, for the livestock associations, wildlife exporters, *et cetera*, because they are the custodians and the ones in charge of dealing with wildlife conservation and protection. Then there is the wildlife conservation; there is the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and not forgetting, the local authorities or within the regions, where the mandate of the operation of slaughter houses, *et cetera*, comes under the responsibility of the Regional Authority. So, one would need inputs from the other regions, not only from us, as I said, within the Georgetown area.

So, I, therefore, ask and I, therefore, rest with these few remarks to commend that the Bill has been brought, but, however, to criticise that the Bill has been brought without the widest possible consultation. We, therefore, ask that it be placed before a Special Select Committee.

Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it now 4 o'clock. I think it is a fine time to take the suspension. We will return at 5 o'clock.

Sitting suspended at 4.00p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.00 p.m.

Mr. Charlie: Hon. Members and Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my Colleagues and to add my contribution to the Animal Welfare Bill No. 21 of 2016. The notion of this Bill is a meritorious one, since its measures are intended to prevent cruelty to all animals, whether of the domestic variety and bred for purposes of income generation and companionship, and the provision of security for experimental purposes and, most importantly, for animals of the wild.

There are issues that need to be addressed to support the imperatives of this particular Bill and I ask that this Bill be sent to a Parliamentary Special Select Committee. The prerequisites of a consultative process, through a Special Select Committee, would broaden the scope for deliberations with stakeholders across the spectrum of the nation, including the livestock associations, inclusive also of the Rupununi Livestock Producers' Association, Wildlife Exports - most importantly, the Indigenous peoples' of this nation, persons and groups in charge of wildlife conservation and protected areas, the Guyana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (GSPCA), the local government bodies and the Amerindian village councils.

There are other legislations that may overlap with some sections in this Animal Welfare Bill. The statutes referred to in this Bill should obtain more clarity and prevent overlapping and redundancy of the functions and responsibilities of the various organs, and nationwide discussions should facilitate the strengthening of this Bill. It is observed that these statutes are under the purview of different Government Ministries. The Animal Welfare Bill falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as the Guyana Livestock Development Authority Act and the Animal Health Act of 2011. However, because the Animal Welfare Bill includes wild animals, it also falls under the Wildlife Management and Conservation Act of 2016, although no Commencement Order has been issued. The Protected Areas Act, which falls under the Ministry of the Presidency, and to be clear and precise, production animals for slaughter houses and income generation fall under the local government bodies. This Bill will also create an Animal Welfare Commission. The functions of which are ambiguous, as drafted, yet the authority referred to is the Guyana Livestock Development Authority, as enshrined under the GLDA Act, with the competent authority being the Animal Health Unit.

This Bill cause for the training of persons who will carry out the mandates as outlined, including those who are raising production animals. Again, this will be very problematic. This is a Georgetown oriented Bill since it ignores cattle rearing and movement of animals to slaughter in the hinterland regions.

Clause 32 refers to filming or television production, also competition. Is this clause referring to the rodeos as well as the horse racing? If so, this will impose additional registrations with other agencies that will definitely come at a cost. Clause (11) (6) states:

“Notwithstanding anything in this section to the contrary, a farmer may using his own vehicle transport his own animal for not more than fifty kilometres from any holding.”

In the preparation of this Bill was the Rupununi region considered? To the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, why this restriction? This restriction would have a negative impact on livestock framers across this nation.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic, on this side of the House, saw numerous irrelevant changes to the former proposed Bill. Additionally, many clauses have now been replaced with offences and penalties that were not part of the proposed Bill.

5.14 p.m.

These include clauses 10 (2), 11 (8), 14 (5), 16 (6), 20 (3), 21 (5), 22 (4), 23 (2), 24 (2), 26 (3), 27 (6), 28 (3), 29 (3), 31 (5), 34 (2), 35 (5) and 37 (7). The additional offences and penalties would be additional burdens on the Guyanese people as well as create more bureaucracy which includes registration of pet shops, zoological parks, circus, competitions and exhibitions and filming of animals. What would now become of the annual Rupununi Rodeo, the annual North Rupununi Fish Festival and ecologists in the Rupununi, such as Karanambo among others? Who are involved in ecotourism? As far as we are aware, these are registered businesses, but now they would be required to register with the Guyana Livestock Development Authority under this Animal Welfare Bill.

The Bill even requires that a person who breeds three dogs or more for sale be registered. I now bring this to the attention of the House and I refer to clause 6, particularly how vehicular accidents involving animals would be dealt with.

The People's Progressive Party (PPP) is convinced that there are some issues to clarify and some issues that would cause serious problems as they pertain to this Bill. These must be addressed. For this reason, we believe and request that this Bill be sent to a parliamentary Special Select Committee for consideration.

I rest my case and I thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Rajkumar: I rise in support of the Animal Welfare Bill, Bill No. 21 of 2016, as was presented by the Minister of Agriculture Hon. Noel Holder to this honourable House.

I join with my fellow colleagues on this side of the House in supporting the passage of this Bill. Animal welfare, in simple terms, may be defined as the avoidance of abuse and exploitation of animals by humans, by maintaining appropriate standard of accommodation, feeding and general care, the prevention and treatment of disease and the assurance of freedom of harassment and unnecessary pain and discomfort. It imposes upon us the responsibility to protect and care for our animals, whether domesticated or found in the wild. This concept of animal welfare has been with human civilisation since in times of the domestication of animals for their use in agriculture, animal husbandry and as a means of transportation. Domesticated animals were kept by persons who took pride in rearing them. They were well fed and properly taken care of.

We, in Guyana, have animals as pets. We rear them for their meat and milk; we use them as a means of transportation, in many cases, they are our only companion. Animals are important to us and it is our duty to ensure that they are properly taken care of and protected. We have a moral duty to protect our animals from persons who cause them deliberate, intentional and unnecessary pain and suffering and to protect them from being abused and neglected. It is in this light that this Government is seeking to pass this Animal Welfare Bill, Bill No. 21 of 2016.

The Animal Welfare Bill sets out to deal with the welfare of animals. It seeks to provide for their protection and health and matters connected with their well-being, whether they are domesticated or found in the wild. It has been recognised internationally that the concept of animal welfare is grounded in five basic principles. These principles have been established in this House today by my colleague, the Hon. Dr. Cummings. I would like to repeat them.

- The first is the freedom from hunger and thirst. Animals must be given adequate food and water so that they could grow and develop.
- Secondly, there is freedom from pain and injury or disease. They must be prevented from being injured or, in case of suffering from disease, given rapid diagnosis or early treatment.
- Freedom from discomfort: animals must be provided with shelter and comfortable resting areas.
- Fourthly, there is freedom from fear and distress. They must be kept in conditions and treated in a manner which avoids mental suffering.
- Freedom of expression in their natural behaviour: animals must be provided with sufficient space, proper facilities and company of their own.

This Bill is a comprehensive document which embraces these five freedoms in creating rules which would regulate interaction between humans and animals to an accepted international standard. I have seen animals tied to one spot and left for days without food and water. I have seen animals with injuries put to work. I have seen sick animals left to fend for themselves and then die of neglect. Animals are often struck down by motorists and left to suffer. We must not forget that persons put pit bulls to fight against each other for their amusement and enjoyment, causing suffering to these animals. They also put cocks to fight each other, resulting in death.

We are duty-bound to protect our animals from these atrocities, even if persons have to be fined or imprisoned. The legal interpretation of the word “and” is “or” and there are legal authorities for these submissions.

The decision regarding animal welfare ought to be based on scientific knowledge and professional judgement with consideration of ethical and societal values. This Bill gives the Minister the authority to establish an Animal Welfare Commission which would comprise experts from relevant fields, to advise him on issues of animal welfare in order to continually address and improve animal welfare concerns.

A large per cent of domestic animals in Guyana are those which are reared for their meat, eggs and milk. This Bill deals, specifically, with the keeping of animals for production purposes. It seeks to provide control of the manner in which animals are kept, handled, transported and

slaughtered. These types of animals provide us with food and they ought to be treated with respect and dignity throughout their lives and, when the time comes, be provided with a humane death.

The Animal Welfare Bill mandates that animals kept for production purposes are adequately fed and watered, provided with space and freedom of movement and suitable accommodation, received proper care when ill and injured, and that persons do not cause them any unnecessary pain and suffering or put them in fear.

This Bill requires persons who wish to transport animals to do so by approved means of transportation and it also sets out the conditions under which animals are to be transported so that they do not suffer any pain, injury or death. It also creates the opportunity for persons who wish to be in the business of transporting animals to be registered with the competent authorities. Farmers must be aware that clause 11, subsection (6) provides that:

“Notwithstanding anything in this section to the contrary, a farmer may using his own vehicle transport his own animals for not more than fifty kilometres from any holding”.

He must be told too that nothing prevents him from transporting his own animals if he satisfies the requirement of clause 11(1). There is nothing preventing him from getting the relevant approval from the requisite authority. He could transport his animals to wherever he wants.

Animals produced for their meat will be slaughtered. This Bill provides how animals are to be handled in slaughterhouses and mandates that animals be stunned prior to slaughter, reducing the pain and suffering of the animals. However, persons who slaughter animals according to religious rights are not required to stun these animals.

The Animal Welfare Bill also provides for the protection of companion animals or pets. These animals are kept primarily for persons' company and or for their protection and for assistance. Pets give companionship to the elderly and to some persons who do not have adequate social interaction with other persons. They give assistance to the blind and some are used for protection, for example as watch dogs. In Guyana, most publicly kept pets are dogs, cats, rabbits, parrots and other birds. However, it is not strange for persons to have animals such as snakes, monkeys and other wild animals as pets. This Bill seeks to protect these types of animals by

ensuring that they are kept in conditions appropriate for their needs. It restricts the keeping of pets in a manner which poses a risk to health and safety to other animals and people. It also restricts the breeding of companion animals to authorised breeders only. It mandates that the owners of companion animals control the reproduction of these animals and ensure that the owners take care of their offspring. There is no requirement for keepers of companion animals to be registered with any authority.

This Bill provides an opportunity for entrepreneurs to establish a facility for providing service to keep pets for owners who would be absent from the jurisdiction for a short period of time.

Pets provide company, protection and other benefits to us. At least, they deserve to be treated with respect and to be properly cared for.

Animals provide us with food. They keep our company and protect us. They are used for transportation and entertainment. Their skins are used to make things for us and animals provide many other things. We would all agree that animals should be treated with respect and we should ensure that they are protected from unnecessary pain and suffering and they are adequately fed with the appropriate feed and kept in an environment suitable for their well-being and development. These are the things that this Bill is calling for and I am sure that each Member in this House would support the passage of this Bill.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Mustapha: I rise to make my contribution to the Animal Welfare Bill, Bill No. 21 of 2016. I would be very brief because a lot has been said, from this side of the House, about the Bill. This Bill has some good intentions in the context of protecting our animals and safeguarding their welfare. Of course, with this Government's unrivalled ability to take something with good intentions and make it reprehensible and draconian, this Bill, as presented, is now in itself a form of cruelty to our livestock farmers.

The impact of this Bill cuts across a wide cross section of our society. These are the issues of concern which I believe must be addressed. As such, we see the need for this Bill to be sent to a parliamentary Special Select Committee. This would allow for consultation with all major stakeholders, including the livestock farmers in the regions, and not in Georgetown and

surrounding areas only, organisations such as the GLDA, the wildlife conservation body, those with responsibility for protected areas, the Guyana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the local government bodies, to name a few.

5.29 p.m.

We must not leave out the grass root farmers, people who go into the field, people who produce in the elements – rain and sun. We should not sit here in this National Assembly and make laws that would make those peoples' lives more miserable in this country.

In addition, there seems to be some ambiguity on how the Bill will be enforced, given that it comes under the Ministry of Agriculture as in the case of the Guyana Livestock Development Authority Act and the Animal Health Act. This Bill includes wild animals which fall under the Wildlife Management and Conservation Act, which, as we just heard the Hon. Member, Alister Charlie, said, is yet to receive a Commencement Order.

These will cause serious problems because to slaughter animals, you have to go to the Local Government bodies, be it the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) or the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs). You also have the GLDA, the Ministry of the Presidency and other agencies. It would be cumbersome on the farmers, people who want to make a livelihood with small livestock rearing. How efficient can this be, given the overlaps with these bodies? Why compound a simple and straightforward issue? This is another example of this Government creating additional bureaucracy. It is not only additional bureaucracy on the part of the Government. Once again, in its quest to stack burdens on the aching backs of Guyanese, this Government has found another way to add more burdens to our people, leaving out the additional tax measures that were in the Budget and other penalties and fees that we debated here not so long ago.

The penalties of some offences and added ones will cripple the people involved. While I am in no way condoning wrongdoings, this Government must be cognisant of the situation that some people face.

What will happen to those simple, hardworking people who raise a few chickens for sale to help sustain a livelihood? What will happen to those simple hardworking people who raise a few pigs

to sell to sustain a living? We heard it, just now, not only from one speaker, but a number of speakers over here, that, if you breed dogs now for sale, you have to register that business. That is literally taking this to the dogs in our country.

What will happen to national events? We just heard about the Rodeo and horse racing. In my region, horse racing is a big attraction. Would the media have to get permission to film it? In promoting tourism, would international filming companies now have to feel the brunt of the bureaucracy to promote our country's tourism potential?

What would be the role of the proposed animal welfare commission under the new Act? Why can a farmer not transport his or her animals beyond 50 kilometres in his or her own vehicle? Would it be that a farmer from Berbice or a far-flung area, coming to Georgetown, would have to transport his or her animals, 50 kilometres in his or her vehicle and then use another vehicle to transport that animal to Georgetown? This is additional burden on the backs of livestock farmers. In the long run, it would mean that the cost of meat will increase further. The burden will further come on the backs of the people of our country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister this question: why does the Government believe that it has a mandate to march us into poverty in this country? For the last 19 months, we have seen the standard of living of our people going down further and further every day. The Government feels that it has a right and a mandate to impoverish our people in this country.

We are seeing, every single day, the progress that has been made over the last 23 years when the PPP/C was in Government, being eroded by this incompetent and hopeless Government that has no vision.

Before I conclude, I want to make two major points. In my region and across the country, there are lots of stray animals on the roadside, especially in Region 6. There are also animals that people take care of in the pastures. If this Government wants to protect animals, and when it talks about animal welfare, it has to have proper facilities for animals. You do not come here and pass a Bill for formality sake. You have to put the infrastructure in place; you have to put the facilities in place before you pass a Bill so that we can take care of the welfare of our animals. We should not increase pastures fees like what the Mahaica-Mahaicony Abary/Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) farmers are facing now. The people in Black Bush Polder,

No. 5274 on the East Bank of Berbice and the front lands in Whim are scared that their fees will increase too. We heard Comrade Seeraj talk about the Kokerit Savannah, the No. 43 Sookram area. These are pastures where farmers rear their cattle. If this Government has good intentions to improve the welfare of animals, then it should not increase fees; it should give incentives to farmers so that they can take care of these animals.

There are stray catchers who descend on peoples' animals. They take them to the police station and place them in a dilapidated shed. These animals are not fed and are allowed to die a slow death – a starvation death. Is this how this Government wants to take care of the welfare of animals?

With all these concerns that I have raised and my Colleagues have raised, I think that it is appropriate, if the Government has good intentions and wants to take care of the welfare of the animals in this country, to refer this Bill to a special select committee so that we can have wider consultations.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Holder (replying): I heard the concerns of the Members of the Opposition but I must reiterate that our perception of the importance of animal welfare to our own wellbeing dictates our actions to animals in general.

The role of Animal Welfare in Food Safety and, by extension, its importance to trade in animals and animal products, impose upon us the need to change the way we treat animals under our care to reduce the impact on our own wellbeing as we interact with animals and consume their meat.

The humane treatment of animals is established in international standards and codes of practice. Moreover, our potential trading partners require that we institute these standards so that we can comply with their own legislation. This is particularly true for the European Union and the United States of America. The rest of the world is coming on board as they recognise the importance of animal welfare and animal health and the incidence and spread of diseases.

Zoonoses such as tuberculosis and brucellosis are gaining more attention as we see increases in the occurrence of pathogens, such as Listeria, Campylobacter and E.coli, which threaten to undermine our food safety efforts. Thus the strengthening of the rules and codes of practices and

the implementations of stringent standards are required. Guyana is not immune to such outbreaks and, as we develop, we will see the importance of adapting and complying with international rules.

The increased movement of personnel in and out of our country as petroleum and mining industries gain momentum will necessitate that we improve the way we deal with our animals and the way we treat food. Improving our farming systems and the reduction in the use of antibiotics will surely see benefits not only to our consumers, but also to our farmers as we see reduced expenses and subsequent increased profits.

The provision of the Animal Welfare Bill, together with the forthcoming 12 Regulations, will lay out the rules under which our animals will be cared for so as to reduce stress and eventually reduce the presentation of diseases. We will have to pay attention to improving our quarantine systems to prevent the entrance of exotic diseases while, at the same time, we have to implement measures like the Pet Passport Scheme.

In summary, the Animal Welfare Bill will deal specifically with the welfare of all animals and provide for their protection, life, health and other similar matters. The Bill pays particular attention to the welfare of animals at the time of slaughter, during transportation, production and also companion animals. Under the Bill, an Animal Welfare Commission will be established, which shall have oversight of all animal welfare issues. It would address modern issues related to the well-being of animals, enable Guyana to trade internationally, enhance the animal health situation, increase production and establish a standardised manner to treat animals on the modern production system.

In conclusion, and bearing in mind the concerns of the Hon. Members of the Opposition, I move that the Animal Welfare Bill 2016 – Bill No. 21 of 2016 be read a second time and referred to a special select committee of this honourable House for further consideration.

Bill read a second time and referred to a Special Select Committee.

FOOD SAFETY BILL 2016 – BILL NO. 22/2016

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to prevent the spread of food borne diseases through the control of the production, preparation, handling, storage and the transportation of food and provide for connected matters.” [*Minister of Agriculture*]

Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, as Guyana moves towards a more modernised agricultural sector with an effective and more sustainable system for ensuring food security, access to safe food and maintaining a healthy and productive population, a food safety Bill is introduced.

For Guyana to be a part of the worldwide food system, whose goal is food security, that is, ensuring that all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, there is need for a massive overhaul of Guyana’s food laws.

Guyana must adapt to the changing global patterns of food production, international trade, technology and public expectations for achieving a safe food supply

5.44 p.m.

Food safety is a fundamental public health concern. As such, health protection, among other factors, has created an increasingly demanding environment in which food safety systems operate.

Agriculture is unarguably one of the flourishing productive sectors in Guyana and contributes to almost 20% of our economy, not to mention 33% of Guyana’s export earnings, generating \$80 billion of export income in 2015. Therefore, it is vital that we do all we can to protect our standing as a supplier of safe and suitable food, both domestically and internationally.

To amplify the need for this Bill, let us examine just three dimensions of food safety. First, there is safety from the increasing risk of food-borne diseases and its implications on the cost of healthcare. Secondly, with economic growth, there is the increase in consumer demand for quality consumables, specifically safe food. And finally, there is the question of who is responsible for food safety - consumer, producer or the Government.

With respect to the responsibility for food safety, this is shared by everyone involved with food, from production to consumption, including growers, processors, regulators, distributors, retailers

and consumers. However, the Government is mandated to provide an enabling institutional and regulatory environment for food safety.

With this Bill, the Government will be one step closer to our programme to streamline food safety. We need a food system that encourages improvement, drives value-addition, and inspires more food businesses to export. It includes strengthening our responses to food safety incidences, creating consistency and fairness in the enforcement for non-compliance and improved accessibility to information.

In today's world, consumers ask more of authorities. Consumers want assurance that the food they consume is produced in an animal friendly and environmentally sustainable way; none or minimal pesticides; no antibiotics and hormone injections in feed material or livestock, *et cetera*. The Government creates a framework for food safety through a system of rules, inspections and controls but food producers remain primarily responsible for the safety of their products. There are limits to what the Government can do, and, in many cases, the sector itself will have to develop a supervisory system.

Under this Act, a food safety authority would be created. By doing so, Guyana would be following suit of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) in maintaining consumer confidence at a high level to alleviate concern. The auspice of such an authority falls under the Ministry of Agriculture. The food safety authority would provide for the consolidation of various inspectorates from the Guyana Livestock Development Authority, Veterinary Public Health, Municipality, Food and Drugs Department, Plant and Environmental Health. This is similar to what occurred in the Netherlands in 2003. Several Government organisations in the field of food safety were brought together in the Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority. This single organisation was responsible for governmental supervision of the entire food chain. Just as in the Netherlands, we think it is more effective to have a single organisation responsible for enforcement in the entire chain.

With the Food Safety Act, there would be no significant increase in costs. Initially, funds would be appropriated from the parent agencies. Various units would make up the food safety authority, including the food safety laboratory, meat and agro processing; food service and hospitality; quarantine and border control; food borne illnesses; and common food inspection. The Bill

illustrates Government's commitment to ensuring the safety and suitability of food, which is vitally important for the health of consumers, and our international trade position is strengthened.

The Food Safety Authority plans to follow a meticulously coordinated, step-by-step approach to encourage proper food safety practices. One of the areas to be given a high priority is the surveillance and inspection of food and food related diseases in Guyana. Heavy and increased surveillance will be practiced regarding the production of foods and the use of food ingredients. This is to curb the spread of health related diseases and ensure that the food related products being imported, exported or used for sale within the local market meet the health standards put forward in this Bill. Any food supplies deemed unfit for consumption or any other uses will be retracted and will be destroyed if it cannot be sterilised.

The Food Safety Authority introduces, to Guyana, numerous cautionary and solution-oriented methods and stipulations that have been prescribed by international bodies such as Codex Alimentarius, a subsidiary of the World Health Organization (WHO) and whose food safety standards act as a global marker for food producers and consumers internationally, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), a subsidiary of the United States (US) Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA).

By upgrading food safety standards to meet those of Codex Alimentarius, Guyana will be opening up new doors to trade and negotiations regarding food hygiene, residues of pesticides and veterinary drugs, and prevention of chemical and microbiological contamination, among the members of Codex Alimentarius. Guyana, now more than ever, needs to restructure its food safety system in order to be recognised internationally and to tap into foreign markets.

The US Food and Drug Administration has increased transparency in the food supply chain by conducting more foreign inspections so as to assess the issue from the source. Inspections will be done mainly in areas of manufacture, distribution, storage and handling of food and food related products, areas Guyana has been lagging behind.

The strategy of the FSA will be based on the one-health concept, which aims for a more integrated collaboration among parties, both regionally and locally, to tackle issues concerning public human and animal health. Guyana currently has a very fragmented agricultural system

with disciplines such as veterinary public health, plant health, environmental health and other such parties working separately. This Bill proposes a more integrated system to employ a risk-based assessment to identify health hazards related to each discipline just mentioned, and formulate preventative controls to reduce the future surfacing of such hazards.

The Food Safety Bill, in its entirety, would assist in the prevention of food borne diseases through the control of the production, preparation, handling, storage and transportation of food. It would also coordinate and regulate the fragmented system for food safety in Guyana; alleviate the high levels of diarrheal diseases in children under five years old; and promote more market opportunities for producers.

I would like to mention three specific effects resulting from the implementation of this Bill:

Firstly, traceability practices will be implemented to follow the growth of plants and animals throughout all stages of production. Traceability allows for the observation of the growth, nature and spread of diseases and, thus, provides a better understanding of how these diseases can be contained or eliminated.

Secondly, strategic advances will be taken in the area of risk assessment to identify food related hazards, characterise them into groups and to assess the mobility of diseases as well as to identify the health risks that are attached to producing and marketing certain foods. The food safety authority plans to follow the FDA's initiative of adapting a risk-based programme to aid in the prevention of hazards before they happen. By using this approach, identifying and characterising hazards is given priority.

Thirdly, along with the introduction of biotechnology to aid in the production of food products and genetically modified foods (GMOs), the need arises for policies to be put in place, governing the use of food and food ingredients obtained *via* genetic engineering. Genetic Engineering and the adding of chemicals to foods are very beneficial in the agriculture industry in terms of maximising food production and the quality of the food produced on a large scale. But an advance in this area also comes with a number of risks of experimenting with genetically modified foods and safety measures must be identified along with a detailed methodology of how to go about experimenting with certain foods. Policies need to be implemented as well as

guidelines for the safe use of foods, ingredients and technologies when dealing with genetically modified foods.

It would be remiss of me not to apprise this honourable House of the history of this Food Safety Bill in the preparation of which both the Government and the Opposition have been intimately involved.

Since the early 1990s, the staff of the Plant and Animal Quarantine Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture's Crops and Livestock Department have been clamouring for the formation of an integrated plant and animal health inspectorate. This call was later amplified with the Animal Health Unit pressing for the inclusion of post-mortem inspection of animal carcasses and by-products in its responsibility for the ante-mortem inspection of animals.

In 2003 to 2004, under a Technical Cooperation Programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), entitled "Strengthening of National Food Safety Systems", the weaknesses of the disintegrated food safety system were identified and a coordinated approach to the integration of the system was recommended. The objective of the project was to assist the Government in the establishment of an effective national food control system that is capable of ensuring the quality and safety of food supply in the country. The proposed assistance was intended to provide the country with updated food laws and standards; organised and coordinated food control activities; staff trained and national laboratories capability upgraded, thereby contributing to foster increased export of food products and safety of the domestic food supply.

In 2005, under the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and Government of Guyana (GoG) Health Service Development Programme, a consultant, Mr. Frank Williams, assisted in a review of the very old Public Health Ordinance and the drafting of the Health Protection and Promotion Bill (HPPB). This Bill sought to widen and modernise the scope of the Public Health Ordinance.

The year 2005 also saw the drafting of the Food Control Regulations under the Health Protection and Promotion Bill, which sought to establish a Food Authority and the coordinating mechanisms of the food safety system, including an upgrade of the Food and Drug Regulations. The whole scope of the HPPB was found eventually to be too wide and was overlapping with other legislation and encroaching on too many Ministries, so much so that it became burdensome

to try to establish a coordinating mechanism to integrate the public health and food safety systems.

In 2008, the Ministry of Agriculture launched the Agricultural Export Diversification Programme (ADP) which sought to put non-traditional agricultural produce on the export market through the strengthening of the support systems in the Ministry of Agriculture and the regulatory systems shared by the Ministries of Agriculture and Health, amongst other interventions. A consultancy firm, Agrotec Spa, was hired and tasked with conducting a General Agricultural Practices (GAP) analysis and the review and drafting of new agricultural legislation to enable Guyana to enter the export market for the so called four P's: pepper, pumpkin, plantain and pineapple. The consultant soon recognised this disintegrated food system to be the key hindrance to the success of such a venture and recommended the establishment of enabling legislation for the formation of a food safety authority and the regulation and control of food.

In 2009, the National Coordinating Committee for Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (NCCSPSM) was resuscitated as part of the conditions of the loan for the Agricultural Export Diversification Programme, and this body formed a Food Safety Committee which met regularly to examine the activities concerning agricultural health and food safety, and to lend oversight to the implementation of these activities. The Food Safety Committee of the National Coordinating Committee for Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures comprised the Heads of the Veterinary Public Health, Food and Drug and the Environmental Health Departments of the Ministry of Health, the Heads of the Animal Health Unit, the Plant Health Unit and the Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Control Board (PTCCB) of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Chief Environmental Health Officer of the Mayor and City Council of Georgetown, the Agricultural Health Specialist of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA), a representative of the Bureau of Standards and the Agricultural Health and Food Safety Specialist of the Agricultural Export Diversification Programme.

5.59 p.m.

With the drafting of the CARICOM Model Legislation for Food Safety, which was based on the FAO's draft model food law, this Committee soon agreed on focusing its attention on reviewing and drafting the current food safety legislation and the organisation of the soon to be established

authority. The Food Safety Committee met regularly and approved an acceptable draft in 2011. Stakeholder consultations as well as consultations with industry personnel were conducted and the Bill was further tweaked. The resulting draft was presented to the Chief Parliamentary Counsel (CPC) for review.

In 2013, the Minister of Agriculture presented the draft Food Safety Authority Bill to Cabinet, which was never presented to Parliament for consideration.

In June of 2016, the CARICOM draft model Food Safety Bill was validated at a workshop in Barbados and, on examination, adjustments which were needed for complete compatibility were incorporated.

This Food Safety Bill ensures Guyana's ascension in international trade markets, propelled by the number of food safety regulations proposed in the Bill. The activation of such practices within Guyana will ensure that the country is a benefactor of the many advantages that can be gained with the compliance of food safety regulations. It will boost the economy and ensure consumer confidence as well as give Guyana a national reputation in terms of food products exported.

The Food Safety Bill, when enacted, would create an effective and more sustainable system for ensuring access to safe food and health. Therefore, I implore the House to welcome the Food Safety Bill and for the Hon. Members' unanimous support in its passing.

In conclusion, I commend this Bill for approval by this honourable House.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be able to speak on this very important document before us today. This is a very important issue we are addressing - food safety - as the Minister pointed out. Food safety has many ramifications, including the impact not only on the health and wellbeing of the nation, but also with respect to our economic prospects, the export of food products reaching certain international standards, among other things.

The Bill sets the task of creating an authority which will enforce certain things to achieve the objectives I just spoke of. To do so, certain new structures are going to be put in place. Some are

going to be staffed by new postings or designations, many of which will be given certain enforcement powers. While recognising the need for a very cautious approach to food safety and an authoritative approach at all levels of food production, transportation and consumption, including local and exported, at the same time, I need to point to some issues we should pause to look upon because these are capable and have actually discomfited some of our constituents.

For example, there is the post of the food analysts and the food inspectors which are quite necessary for the regulatory functions of attaining quality and acceptable standards of our foods. At the same time, *the devil is in the detail*. This is a beautiful document, a good document. I suggest that it could be even better if it is looked at a little closer. The post I referred to would be having certain severe powers of detention and intervention into the food process and the distribution of food, including seizing and sequestering for certain periods. In some instances, we are told the periods when the seizing of such products, including documents relating to the products, can be had. In other instances, we are not told; the details are not there. The Minister might very well advise us that that may come out in the Regulations but these things, at the same time, create some discomfort because it can have a severe impact not only on the availability of the particular product, but also on the economic viability of the firm, of the entity dealing in that product that has attracted the legitimate attention of these operatives. At the same time, because of the powers they have bestowed upon them, the culture within which we live and the experiences we have, sometimes the suspicion of abuse is breathed. We, on this side of the House, are not satisfied that there are enough checks and balances in the Bill, as presented, to prevent such abuse. It might not happen but it might happen. If it does happen and does become endemic, the beautiful aim of the Bill can be undermined. In that regard, I will like to be very short.

While recognising what was a regurgitation of the summary that the Minister just gave to us, I would like to recognise the goodness of the Bill and, at the same time, say that we deserve an even better Bill. This is a good foundation on which to build a better Bill. In that regard, I will like to join, linking to the previous Bill we discussed, to suggest that it would serve us better if all of these details, the nitty-gritty, some 14 big Parts divided into as many as 25 clauses, get better attention. The Minister did a very good job in giving outlines of the scope of what is being addressed. It would be too tempting to pass it because of its importance. At the same time,

because of the importance, I would like us to determine today that collectively we have enough time. This is too important: the importance of how we export our foods and how they are accepted, the quality of persons who we will be putting to supervise, the checks and balances we are putting over them to see they do a good job and make us proud. I am recommending to this House that this good Bill be sent to a select committee so that it could be scrutinised with a wider cross section of views and, at the same time, be made into a near perfect Bill, a better Bill.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Social Cohesion [Dr. Norton]: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I rise to lend my support to the Food Safety Bill, Bill No. 22 of 2016. This Bill serves to facilitate, as was stated before, the prevention of food borne diseases by controlling the production, preparation, handling, storage and transportation of all foods. Food borne diseases, either infectious or toxic in nature, are caused by agents that enter the body through the ingestion of food. For this reason, a robust food safety control system is very important to all of Guyana, but particularly in the areas of public health and agriculture as it is directly related to the protection of Guyanese citizens against food borne illnesses.

Food safety means assurance that food will not harm the consumer when it is prepared and or ingested. This is being addressed by this Bill. It is key to ensuring food and nutrition safety in the entire country. It is important and would have been so in the making, for some time, to bring this Bill to this august House at this particular time. As a matter of fact, this Bill is long overdue. This is particularly so because the epidemiology of food borne diseases at the community level all across the country is poorly understood and little information is available on the magnitude and burden of food borne diseases. This information is also lacking the key pathogens responsible for these food borne diseases. This has resulted in limiting the appropriate preventative measures and control strategies which are necessary to correct this unhealthy situation. It is precisely for this reason that the Ministry of Public Health of Guyana along with the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) with the Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) conducted a burden of illness study here in Guyana.

The burden of illness is the incidence and prevalence of morbidity, disability and mortality associated with acute and chronic manifestation of diseases. The burden of illness study was

conducted to garner relevant and useful information on the burden of illness that is needed to facilitate food borne disease control effects, particularly that of gastroenteritis, and to determine the true burden and economic impact of food borne illnesses, especially that of gastroenteritis, since this is the key syndrome that is related to food borne infection.

Gastroenteritis is manifested by the symptoms of diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea and abdominal cramps, along with other manifestations. The approval of this Bill by the National Assembly will positively impact on the situation. This is so because, for instance, in 2007, in Guyana, there were almost 14,000 cases of gastroenteritis. In 2008, there were 32,000 cases. Hence, this Bill will certainly have a positive impact after its implementation, especially on the reduction of infant mortality due to gastroenteritis.

This Coalition Government is committed to the realisation of the goal of the reduction of infant mortality. We do so as a whole and specifically due to acute gastroenteritis. One can remember the motion raised by the now President of this county, His Excellency the President David Arthur Granger, then the Leader of the Opposition, for the Commission of Inquiry into the Outbreak of Gastroenteritis in Region 1, particularly in the Port Kaituma sub-region where as much as 10 children had died in one year and dozens during the past years. The deaths of our infants due to gastroenteritis must be something of the past. This Coalition Government is committed to doing all that is necessary to achieve this goal. I urge that the House does support this Bill.

This Bill caters for the establishment of a food safety authority which is a body corporate whose administration and management is vested in a board of not more than 12 members and shall be responsible for the implementation and enforcement of the provisions of this Bill. This includes overseeing all aspects of compliance with international standards of food safety, which is the key to ensuring heightened consumer confidence.

This Bill, with regard to compliance with international standards for food safety, makes direct reference to such international bodies as Codex Alimentarius which consists of the rules governing food safety. These rules are recommended by a commission known as the Codex Alimentarius Commission which was established by a Resolution of the 11th Session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization.

6.14 p.m.

That Commission is a subsidiary body of the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization and it is entrusted with the elaboration of international standards of food to protect the health of consumers and to ensure fair practices in the food trade.

Under this authority this Bill provides for the designation of the suitable qualified persons as food analyst who would be authorised to conduct food safety test to identify selective priority pathogen commonly transmitted by food, for example salmonella, shigella, campylobacter, pathogenic, staphylococcus, aureus and the E. coli. These selective pathogens ranked among the most common causes of outbreaks and food borne diseases in the Caribbean, including Guyana.

As was said by the Hon. Minister, one of the most important aspects of this Bill is that this food safety authority among other things is to ensure that food safety policy is centrally driven to achieve the objectives set forth by one governing body to avoid repetition and ambiguity. This food safety authority will monitor all areas, including livestock and crop production, food processing and manufacturing, meat and fish processing, inspection and sales, water production, bottling and sale, restaurant and supermarket inspection and street vending, amongst other.

Another key function of this authority would be the control of entry of food through border ports and ports of entry. The authority may at any time order that any food that is imported into Guyana be held at a particular place until an inspection or re-inspection is conducted. One can remember not so long ago with the Lailac milk which had to be recalled because it was found that the date on the boxes had a viable expiry date, while on the tins that date for expirations had long passed, and there was the difficulty in finding exactly where that milk was manufactured. The tins of the milk were actually found to be infested with worms and one can remember the difficulty encountered in getting this product off the shelves of shops and supermarkets.

The Bill gives the Minister the authority on the adviser of the board to ensure that certain articles of food shall not be imported into Guyana unless they have been produced or manufactured in accordance with certain prescribed standards as was mentioned before the Codex Alimentarius. Also in this Bill it is an offence and liable on summary conviction if a person gives a wrong labelling on containers or wrappers which falsely describes the food or is likely to be misleading as the nature of substance of the food.

Only recently in Guyana a so-called milk product was asked to be withdrawn from the market after it was discovered to have the labelling of a cow on a can which turned out to be a milk substitute from a vegetable source and had nothing to do with the cow. This totally was misleading the public. The authority shall conduct the following activities for the purpose of preventing or eliminating food hazards and outbreaks of food breaks disease. The authority shall carry out inspection of food and premises, shall maintain food relating statistics and organise testing analysis of food. What is noted is that every registered medical practitioner and food analyst would be required to report to the authority and to the Chief Medical Officer any incident of a food related illness encountered in the course of their duties. Similarly any food handler and food business operator who observes the prevalence of a food hazard or a food borne disease shall, as soon as possible, notify the authority or the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) or the Chief Veterinarian Officer (CVO) of the hazard or the disease. Here we see the involvement of the CMO and the CVO playing an integral role practically together in the functioning of this Bill.

This brings into play the new phenomenal of one health concept. To this effect Guyana was invited to the 17th Inter-ministerial Meeting on Health and Agriculture which was held in Asuncion Paraguay on July 21st and 22nd 2016 through Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and World Health Organization (WHO) and was attended by the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and myself. The issue discussed at that conference revolved around the sectorial collaboration on health and agriculture for the sustainable development goals. This concept recognises that the health of human is connected to the health of animals and the environment. For instance, some disease can be spread between animals and humans, for example, rabies, West Nile Virus, fever and especially the salmonella infection. These diseases are known as zoonotic diseases. This One Health concept involves applying coordinated, collaborative, multidisciplinary and cross sectional approach to address potential or existing risk that originate at the animal human eco-system interface.

This worldwide One Health initiative in its vision statement establishes seven interventions for the achievements for these goals, joint educational efforts between human and veterinary medical school and schools of public health and environment, joint communication efforts in journals conferences and networks, joint efforts in clinical care through assessment treatment and prevention joint cross section disease surveillance and control effects in public health, joint effort

in better understanding the cross species disease transmission, joint effort in the development evaluation of youth diagnostic methods medicines and vaccines for the prevention and control of disease across the species and last joint efforts to inform and educate political leaders and public sectors through accurate medical publication.

In making this One Health a reality, three persons were trained as one health leaders from Guyana for a period of two years as part of a larger One Health, One Love, One Caribbean project. Guyana is one the countries that took the lead in the formation of this regional approach to One Health. Through the One Health, One Love, One Caribbean project the veterinary laboratory and the other agencies such as Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the Food and Drug Department (FDD) would have started to do anti-microbial resistance work in poultry. This is in collaboration with the Ohio State University and we are looking for resistance in the salmonella that may be present in our poultry and the same would be done in human to establish possible link. While there is no National One Health Committee, however the International Health Regulation Committee acts as one and can be considered as such since the functions are closely related.

In closing, I urge that we all support this Bill since the Guyana Food Safety Authority, which would be established on the passing of this legislation, was conceptualised to embrace the One Health concept by establishing one body to oversee, regulate and promote the safety of food through all the facet of its production.

Thank you very much [*Applause*]

Mr. Seeraj: I must admit that I have learnt a lot. I have read this Bill during the course of the last few days. It is not an area that I am too familiar with, so I made an extra effort to pay close attention to the different clauses and subsections. I must admit that I am more enlightened after the presentation of the former Minister of Health. He is much prepared now on health matter than he was before.

Having said that, the importance of a Food Safety Bill, I do not think we can in anyway really underestimate or overestimate the importance of food safety. It is a Bill that seeks to, as Minister Holder said, bring most, if not all, the agencies associated with food safety under one umbrella organisation. The matter of food safety, having read about occurrences of out breaks of food

borne diseases, limited here in our local jurisdiction, but in other jurisdiction we have seen, from time to time, periodically out breaks that have impacts on human lives. As the Hon. Member Dr. Norton said about 2007 to 2008, we had some outbreak of gastroenteritis in Region 1.

This Bill is focusing a lot on education, regularising, licensing and to some extent educating persons who are involved in the production, processing, handling, transporting, storing of food and food products and targeting those persons. Of major concerns, based on the submission that would have been made earlier and mentioned was made again by the Hon. Dr. Norton, are incidences of food items coming into our borders that are not properly labelled and some are not in a safe way for human consumption. I think the biggest danger to food safety here in Guyana lies in that area. I say so, because over the decades besides incidences of gastroenteritis and the occasional vomiting and diarrhoea, Guyana itself has not suffered from any of the more sophisticated food borne diseases. That is because in Guyana we have not been exposed to the kind of skulduggery that have been perpetuated in other areas, in terms of passing on processed food that are barely fit or in some instances unfit for human consumptions just for commercial purposes, just for the reason of making money. We have heard just recently of plastic rice entering into some jurisdiction in the Caribbean.

I would have expected that the Bill would focus more on strengthening our capacity, our capabilities, and intelligence at our ports of entry. Mention is made here, but the focus of the Bill seems to be on local production, handling, storing, transportation, and all of that. I would want to stress that we concentrate more at our port of entries to protect our consumers here against the more sophisticated ways and method of infiltration of products that might be disqualified in other jurisdiction and then either the manufacturer or those in possession of those products that were first fit for human consumption and then became unfit for one reason or the other and then the people would try to pass them on here.

6.29 p.m.

Again, some mention was made about milk and there is the picture of cow and the label and the product is not of animal origin. I think that this is an area that we here could do a lot more, in terms of legislation, building capacity and having the human resources at our port of entry.

In the same vein, the port of entry, in most cases, if not all, serves also as our port of export and we would want to protect our reputation. We would want to protect our producers. We will want to protect our national interest in ensuring that whatever we export there would never be any cause for a recall of our products, whether in transit or whether on arrival in any other jurisdiction. A bad name comes easily, and it might take decays for it to go away, so we would want to also strengthen that area to ensure that whatever we export it is fit for human consumption and it would be in that way during the course of its estimated shelf life.

This Bill speaks to genetically modified organism (GMO) food and I am not too clear, in terms of what Guyana's position is as it relates to the consumption of GMO. The Bill seeks to be pointing in a direction that it is not encouraged, but at the same time there is an opening for it to get in by virtue of some pronouncement by the Guyana National Bureau of Standard. I suspect anyone of us who consumes wheaten flour and wheaten flour products would have been consuming GMO. I have no concrete evidence of it, but I want to believe that our import of wheaten flour, given the fact that wheaten flour, its production on the productive process is subjective to GMO. I want to believe that our importation of wheaten flour and subsequently products that are made by wheaten flour here in Guyana, we could say, with some authenticity, that we have been consuming and we are consuming GMO products by virtue of consuming wheaten flour and products of wheaten flour. This Bill probably needs to be a bit more definitive and a bit clearer on our position as it relates to GMO.

I know, for example, in the European Union jurisdiction, there is a zero tolerance for GMO and it has been in clashes with some North America exporters into the European Union jurisdiction, and whilst we have, as I said, a more or less a zero tolerance of it, it is not clear. There are opening. If this Bill is perused by virtue of what I made mentioned of, the Guyana National Bureau of Standard, we have sought in the area of rice production to stay clear of that because one of our largest markets is the European Union. The European Union continues to be an important market for us and because of their zero tolerance to GMO we have sought to maintain our productive processes, our plant breeding and all of that, to stay clear of GMO, so that Guyana would not in any way be labelled as a country that is anyway encouraging GMO and the production of food products using that method.

Some of the measures proposed in this Bill... Again, I think, the intention of this Bill, as it is stated in the Explanatory Memorandum, is to seek to prevent the spread of food borne diseases through the control of production, preparation, handling storage and transportation and all of that. We need to be cautious in our approach also in dealing with the several layers of the production of food and food products, the processes locally here.

I recall back in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, I use to frequent a spot on Regent Street, where there was a street vendor by the name of 'Powers' selling cook-up rice by the Guyana Import and Export (GIMPEX) building. His son has now taken over that building. 'Powers' has since moved on. Even back then, he was an old man. If he was around and would have read this Bill he probably would have died from the shock of the amount of things he would now have to do as it relates to street food vending permit. He would have had to go and get a street food vendor permit, a street food vendor identification card, health certificate, food handler's permit and a host of permit, which I have no doubt is important. Again, for years, and up to now, I personally know, since the late 1980s, that no one has ever suffered any adverse effect from consuming cook-up rice cooked by 'Powers' and now, by his son, and fried shark and fried fish also. It is because our people are knowledgeable about how to take care of, first, those in our immediate care, in our household, and then when we sought to go to commercial activities, then what it is needed to ensure that we do not have any disease, food borne diseases or escalate any food borne diseases and it get out of control and out of hand.

We need to address these matters and not to create too much of a bureaucratic environment and to make it too onerous on our people who are engaged in these simple activities to make an honest livelihood as days goes by. These are activities in which, as I could say, they have been involved in for decays, and we have to move on. The world more or less is becoming a global village. We have a far way to go, in terms of building our capacity to access other markets in terms of processed food. The production process, without support from Government, the cost is too much for us to have access to markets that we are targeting or to have access to the markets that are demanding modern legislation.

The Minister mentioned that the Netherlands would have passed a similar Bill 15 years ago. Fifteen years ago, I am certain, the Netherlands was way more advanced than Guyana is today. Again, I would like to make an appeal, in terms of the education of our people, the building of

awareness, in terms of the issues that are raised in this piece of legislation, and, in terms of consultations, wide cross section consultation with our people who are involved with the production, processing, handling and all of that of food stuff.

As I said, this piece of legislation is positioning Guyana to access those markets, but if I am to take a well-known example, and I think Minister George Norton mentioned that, milk and milk products, we are a very far way, in terms of even becoming self-sufficient in milk, milk product and milk production and that is because of the cost of production. If we cannot compete here locally with the imports of these products from countries that are highly subsidised... I dare say that in some of the European Union jurisdiction a single cow receives a subsidy of three pound per day or three Euro, which is much more than United States (US) dollars per day, every single day, receive support from the Government, and that is why a lot of these products could be more competitive in our jurisdiction than our local producers, especially when they do not receive the kind of support that is needed to make them competitive with products coming in.

I would like to see, and I am certainly all us, the day when Guyanese dairy producers, our farmers, could stand up and say that we have the ability, we have the capacity, we have the know-how, we have the technology and we have the cost down that would make Guyana self-sufficient at least in milk and milk product. That would cut the need for a large chunk of our foreign exchange going towards the importation of milk and milk products from countries such as New Zealand, and especially from the European Union.

How do we address these matters? Legislation, yes, in terms of position our country to have access to those markets. Again, Sir, I want to make the point that you might have access to the market, you might have the legislation in place, but you would not be able to export to those markets because you would not have the capacity or your cost would make you not competitive for you to access those markets and it might be prohibited for you to build self-sufficiency here in our jurisdiction. While it is a good piece of legislation going in the right direction, the timeliness of it is what we have to consider, whether we want to seek to enforce a piece of legislation, which in my honest opinion, we are not ready for and it really would be burdensome on our people who are in this business of handling food when they will be tasked with having to subscribed and become compliant with all the necessary regulations that are contained within this Bill.

I would respectfully want to submit, Sir, through you, to the Minister of Agriculture that this Food Safety Bill, Bill No. 22 of 2016, be the subject of a parliamentary Special Select Committee to, again, provide for a wider cross section of consultation with all of our stakeholders while the Government takes aggressive steps to build the necessary educational and awareness programme, so that our people could gradually buy-in to what is contained in this Bill and the process will move smoothly against jumping in without really testing the waters and jump in and ask our people to start becoming compliant with that which they are not really ready for and that which they were not prepared for. I do not think it is a task that is not doable. I think it is a task that is very much doable. I would want to join my colleagues here in asking the Minister, through you, Sir, that this Bill be taken to a parliamentary Special Select Committee to have the kind consultation that we are speaking about.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Education [Ms. Henry]: I rise to address the Food Safety Bill, Bill No. 22 of 2016 standing in the name of the Hon. Minister of Agriculture. This Bill is a relevant one in light of the fact that international trade of food is growing exponentially, as countries rely on each other to secure inadequate and varied supply, therefore, a new approach to managing the safety of food is enviable.

My presentation would focus on the trade aspect of food safety, especially given the trend that more and more countries are emerging into both significant importers and exporters of food. This Bill provides a framework and significant enhancements to the regulation of food safety for home grown food and the ability to objectively determine the safety of foods produce in foreign countries and imported into Guyana.

In the context of trade, food safety is of paramount importance for culture and the development of create of industries. Here in Guyana culture products such as *cassareep*, *farine*, wines and even syrups made from local fruits could be given a boost with a possibility of export due to the establishment of enabling legislation to regulate and certify their production. As a policymaker for the culture sector, I see potential opportunities for the creative industries to be better leveraged through this Bill which provides excellent context to strengthen cooperation with partners, including our international partners.

6.44 p.m.

This Food Safety Bill is an opportunity, not a threat, and it is also a requirement for Guyana to make progress in food safety. I believe when families sit down to eat, regardless of whether they choose to eat, domestic or imported foods, they must do so with confidence knowing that the food is safe. For that reason, if it is only for that reason, this Bill is paramount to the safety and well-being of our population.

Additionally, this Bill will certainly assist in standardising Government institutions and policies which will contribute significantly towards ensuring our agriculturalists and businessmen are clear about their obligations to protect the health and well-being of their consumers. We are all aware of the need to strengthen quality control and risk management and introduce more efficient measures for deterring negligent business practices. In this endeavour it will be obligatory for Government to work collaboratively and strategically to identify concerns and seek out new innovative measures of cooperation that combine existing efforts to stamp out food negligence.

Further, this Bill is pertinent as more must be done to ensure that preventable food issues do not result in any more confusion such as we have had with the Lailac milk or the outbreak of severe health complications as was alluded to by Dr. Norton. Challenging as this may be, it is not impossible. This Bill is therefore timely as it will also facilitate effective implementation and enforcement of adopted policies and regulations for the efficient functioning of institutions along with testing standards like those recommended as international gold standards. As Guyana transitions into a green state and realises its full potential as being the food basket of the Caribbean small businesses, even such as 'Powers' that we heard about a few minutes ago and the farmers, have to be guided by standards many of which this Bill will bolster.

As I conclude, let me say food safety is receiving heightened attention worldwide as the essential links between food, health and the creative industries are increasingly recognised. New institutions, standards and methods for regulating food safety have increased investment in food hazard control. As we here in Guyana look to the future, it is vital that we continue to strengthen food sustainability and one area that has to be made a priority to achieve this goal is food safety.

Ensuring the integrity of our food supply therefore must be of utmost importance to all of us regarding food security, consumer protection and international trade.

I, therefore have no objection in recommending this Bill to this honourable House for its passage. *[Applause]*

Mr. Lumumba: I rise on behalf of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) to oppose this Bill, Bill No. 22 of 2016 published and called the Food Safety Bill 2016. I oppose it not in all elements but certain parts of it, that is why I would recommend in my presentation, that it goes to the Special Select Committee. Initially I must oppose it.

I think I am speaking today on behalf of the small food handlers. I think my Comrades spoke on the broader picture particularly to do with trade and I want to be more specific, in terms of the impact we can have if it is not handled properly on the small food handlers who are thousands and hundreds. In some aspects I find that the legislation could be a bit harsh and a bit anti-people and anti-poor if it is allowed to stay the way it is without major changes. Most of us here today came from humble homes and many of us are offspring of single parents, especially mothers. Also some of us, through our parents, relatives or neighbours, have been touched by small ma and pa businesses either as employees, volunteers or relatives. Let me remind you of our culture, our village life when we were in our teens. Many of us are from villages such as Golden Grove, Buxton, Queenstown, Dartmouth, Den Amstel and the larger communities such as New Amsterdam and Linden. I am sure you can remember the Saturday nights after 6 o' clock when we would have dressed up and gone to the 'line top' and the 'road top' and Aunty Emma would have brought her black pudding in a tray, Cousin Nora would bring her *mettai*. I notice Minister Roopnaraine and Minister Harmon smiling because they remember those days. **[Mr.**

Jordan: I do not remember those days.] You do not remember. You used to sleep; you had to go home early. Sister James would bring her *sugar cake* and Mrs. Lall would bring her dhal puri.

Hundreds of us are children and grandchildren of that life, including the roadside food vendors. Thousands of school books were bought in our time from revenue generated from those small vendors or operators. Thousands of lessons fees were paid from the shilling and the dollars...

[Mr. Patterson: There were no lessons then.] Yes there was. You would not know you

are not very bright. Thousands of lessons fees were paid from the shilling and the dollars generated from the old food vendors. Mr. Patterson does not remember those days. When the grandfather went into the 'bush' for six months, it is the vendor's cook-up, bread and fish, *mettai*, *sugar cake*, dhal puri, channa and countless other items that sustained the household until a shout came from the *backdam*. Today, there are food vendors who provide a service in front of schools, hospitals, government buildings and nightclubs. They are generating revenue for the same purpose as was our parents and grandparents. As a matter of fact in our days we had a strong extended family. A child could have eaten next door at the neighbour or at Cousin Elsa. A child could have got free lessons in the afternoon from Teacher James and a child could have found a tailor who could provide them with a free pair of pants without sexual molestation being an issue. Today, there is no meaningful extended family. The single parent vendor must pay an exorbitant rent, pay lesson fees, buy expensive sneakers and clothes for child or children and pay for the minibus transportation. [Ms. Ally: Buy yachting boots.] Well, in the modern world it is sneakers.

I make these points and provide these examples because this Bill in its present form without any amendments and with these bookkeeping requirements and all these threats of imprisonments and fines can destroy the fabric of the working poor and possibly force our people out of decent livelihoods. Imagine what would have been our lives if our parents and grandparents were punished for being a vendor. If this Government is saying that the 'small' man is the 'real' man, then Government must not become a nuisance. The Government must work towards that end. I grew up with the theme of the 'small' man being the 'real' man, but here in the National Assembly this Bill is now carrying debt to the 'small' man if it is conceived and if it is put in place in the same manner in which it is written. It seems to me that this could be interpreted as an economic conspiracy, a plot to destroy small vendors and replace them with the rich and powerful.

Let us look at the licensing and registration requirements on pages 22 and 23 of the Bill, in Part VIII. This is where the vendors are threatened with jail.

Registration and Licensing Requirements:

“42. (2) Any person who fails to register and premises used by him for the purpose of a food business commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of twenty thousand dollars and imprisonment of six months”.

“43. (2) A person who operates a food business without a licence issued by the Authority commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of twenty thousand dollars and imprisonment of six months.”

“46.(1) A person shall not, whether permanently or temporarily, be engaged in street food vending unless he is the holder of a valid Street Food Vending Permit and a valid Street Food Vendor Identification Card issued by the Authority.

(2) Anyone who knowingly employs a person who does not hold a valid Street Food Vending Permit to work as a street food vendor commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of twenty thousand dollars.

(3) A person who engages in street food vending without being the holder of a valid Street Food Vending Permit commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of twenty thousand dollars.”

Let us briefly look at the licence and registration requirements:

“42. (2) Any person who fails to register and premises used by him for the purpose of a food business commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of twenty thousand dollars and imprisonment of six months”.

These requirements are programmed for developed countries and cannot work in a poor country where hundreds of families are dependent on an unconventional approach to food handling as a means of survival. It cannot work and will not work. I must agree that we cannot continue to live in the past and change must come, but change must be gradual and must be sound. The issue of permits is too harsh. This Bill needs to be disregarded for many reasons. The vendors need time to adjust. There must be a timeline maybe a year or two and Government must put together a training programme. Each vendor must take classes, maybe two or three-day classes and then be issued with a certificate so that they could understand the business that they are involved in. The registration process should not be a big stick approach.

Let us look at page 24 and 25 of this Bill and you will find that it is scary and threatening the living daylight out of the small vendors. For example, these vendors are the people that the APNU/AFC promised the “good life” and they are now facing either Camp Street or starving children. Well, if jail and being broken are the “good life”, then what is death? The issue gets more laughable. The vendors are now asked to hire or become accountants. Let us look at page 27, under the heading of operating food handling establishments, the poor must now be an accountant and a regular business owner. I am even now more convinced that this is a mechanism to disempower the ‘small’ poor food handler and replace them with the fat cats. In essence, when the little set aside for the poor is taken from them by the means of these atrocious aspects of the Bill which in many forms are authoritarian we need to seriously look in making changes on it.

Just look at some of the extracts that I have pulled out of this Bill. It does not simplify, it does not differentiate. I notice Minister Ally is looking at me very carefully, because I know that they care about the poor. [Ms. Ally: Of course, I do. You too.] Thank you so much. Mr. Speaker, I shall speak to you, not to her. Here are some of the extracts from the Bill:

“59. (1) The owner of every food handling establishment shall keep a register containing the following information: -”

The food handling vendor in front of St. Margaret’s Primary must have a book and in it she must write:

“(a) the daily quantities of food produced, purchased, transported, distributed or sold in the food handling establishment;

(b) the name and address of each person –

(i) from whom food is supplied”

In the case where she buys this food from or the by-product, she must write it in her book and register it.

“(ii) in the case of food distributed or sold in bulk, to whom it is distributed or sold, and

(iii) who transports food to, from or behalf of the food-handling establishment”

6.59 p.m.

“(c) the type, make and licence number of each vehicle which transports food...

(d) the source of ingredients used in food production or preparation; and

(e) the type and quantity of packaging material used...”

[Ms. Lawrence: What cause you to make *[Inaudible]*] Well you see, you did not read the Bill. I am merely helping the Government because it promised these poor people a better life.

[Ms. Lawrence: Which clause?] I will give the new Minister of Public Health the entire

Bill. [Ms. Ally: She wants to know the Clause] I will give her the Bill and she can read it.

“(2) Every package of food intended for sale in Guyana shall bear a label which -

(a) permits its traceability;

(b) sets out such particulars as may be prescribed with the Authority from time to time.

(60) The operator or owner of a food-handling establishment shall ensure that food handlers of the establishment are trained in food safety practices and are supervised in their activities.”

What will happen to the village economy that President Granger spoke about? The President spoke at length about the village economy. Food-handling business is a basic aspect of the village economy, in particular in front of the schools, churches, or on Saturday nights after 6 p.m. where hundreds or dozen of people come out and sell their goods so that they can raise enough moneys to pay for school fees, buy textbooks and buy clothing for their children.

Look at the amount of regulations. This is not a regulation, this is oppression. This Bill will draw the wrath of Donald Trump. It has over 90 regulations. I have no choice but to join with my Colleagues and reject this Bill as it is in its present form and recommend major repairs by way of Special Select Committee.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. Hon. Members, it is now 7 o' clock, I would suggest that we take the suspension now and return at 7.30 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 7.00 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.39 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we resume our debate, I would like to invite you to join with me in wishing a happy birthday to Ms. Sheila Veerasammy. I do not see the Hon. Member here, but it was brought to my attention during the suspension. I thought that the Hon. Members would want to join with me in that. So we wish Ms. Veerasammy, in her absence, best of wishes for her birthday.

Ms. Veerasammy entered the Chamber.

Members applauded.

Mr. Speaker: A dramatic entrance. Happy birthday Ma'am.

The next speaker is the Hon. Mr. Charrandass Persaud.

Mr. C. Persaud: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Sir, I rise to support the Hon. Minister of Agriculture in the tabling of the Food Safety Bill 2016.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened very closely to the presentations of the Members on both sides of the House and, after having looked at the Bill, I came to a very simple conclusion and that is that this Bill is about legislation, rules, regulations and control over persons who serve food, persons who prepare food, persons who deal with anything to do with food. And so, I will not hesitate to support this Bill.

Reference was made to some of the legislation. I will quickly draw the House's attention to one that sounds almost intimidating as it was presented by one of the Hon. Members on the other side. Reference was made to clause 59 where it states:

“59. (1) The owner of every food handling establishment shall keep a register containing the following information –

(a) the daily quantities of food produced, purchased, transported, distributed or sold in the food-handling establishment;”

That by itself simply states that if something is wrong with the chicken that I buy from Arjune or Bounty Farm, and I have it documented that I did bought 100 pounds of chicken, I will know where it came from and it can be traced back to the source. That is protection for me as the food handler.

What is clear here is that, if persons, who are in the food business – anyone, abide by simple regulations, then those persons have nothing to worry about. It is like the taxpayers: If one pays their taxes, regularly, then he/she does not have to worry about which audit they may have to go through or who the Hon. Commissioner General of the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) would send to his/her office or home to conduct an audit. This is because that person would be clean. Clean hands are what this is about. We have nothing to worry about if our hands are clean in the food handling business.

I was very pleased to attend a wake in Georgetown with a friend of mine who is vegetarian. We stopped at a food outlet in Bath Settlement and my friend said that he would like to have some *polourie*. The food handler told my friend that he could not sell him the *polourie* because he knew that my friend was a vegetarian and the *polourie* was fried in the same oil that the chicken was fried in. That man is a good man. He has nothing to be afraid of because, he told the individual, who would not have enjoyed the *polourie* that because it was fried in the same oil as the chicken. If we have more persons like that, these regulations would be like a piece of cake. Do we have more of those persons?

Reference was made to these little food outlets by the schools and street corners. I would like to know that these food handlers came out there with their heads properly covered because I do not want to eat the hair from their heads or any part of their bodies for that matter. If regulations are in place, the food vendors/small vendors who are making a decent living and who simply want to be producing food for us to eat, it must be food that we would like to eat. Cleanliness is a part of the healthy food that we are looking at. This Bill is about presenting us with a healthy lifestyle.

We must get food to eat and whether we get it at home or we get it from vendors at the street corners or restaurants, it must be good food.

I will refer to clause 52, on page 25 of the Bill. That clause speaks to standards: “Part IX – Food Handlers Permit”. Before I came in, I spoke to a food handler in our Parliament and I asked whether they had a food handler’s permit and she said yes or she could not have been working here. They do not have a problem because they have nothing to worry about. The ones who just grab someone on short notice, seeking help in their cafeteria or snackette, once that person does not have a food handler’s permit, the laws are being broken. It is that simple. If something is served to me that I do not like, at a simple pastry shop, for example, I am a vegetarian and I do not eat eggs, what if the pastry is quoted with the yellow of the eggs, which is what they use? I do not eat eggs and if I do not know that the pastry is quoted with eggs I will eat it if I am not told. So if someone is governed by regulations that control what is served to people, then I can bet that one will not serve an item, unless the specifics are stated.

One other thing that has been driving fear in my Friends on the other side, and I will ask them, most politely, to contact the Hon. Mr. Nandlall, who will advise them. Where it is stated that “One is guilty on a summary conviction to a fine of \$20,000 and imprisonment for six months” because of law, the way that it is written the “and” can mean “or”. Again, there is nothing to worry about if one plays by the rules.

I plan to take a few minutes, only, to support this Bill presented by the Hon. Minister of Agriculture. I will not take more time, except to say, that there has been no serious objection from the Opposition and I know that there may be one or two clarifications, but I am sure that they are willing and ready to support this Bill.

I do not hesitate to commend this Bill to the House. [*Applause*]

Mr. Bharrat: I rise in support of my Colleagues to put forward the argument that the Food Safety Bill No. 22/2016, “AN ACT to prevent the spread of food borne diseases through the control of the production, preparation, handling, storage and transportation of food...” should be sent to a Special Select Committee for further consideration and consultations in order for the intended purpose of this Bill to be realised. I am not sure whether this piece of legislation that we

are currently debating would force anyone to tell the Hon. Member, Mr. Charrandass Persaud, whether they are using eggs to coat pastry or to fry *polourie* in oil that fish was fried in.

The Food Safety Bill of 2016 must speak to food safety and food safety, as we know, starts with production. That is why the Minister of Agriculture and not the Minister of Public Health is presenting the Bill to this House. Like my Colleague, the Hon. Mr. Odinga Lumumba, I will speak mostly to the impacts this Bill would have on our local economy, an economy that is already witnessing the downfall in so many sectors – rice, sugar, forestry, construction. Today, we are looking at two Bills that would put further hardships on our cash and poultry farmers and now our food production sector.

7.51 p.m.

In my view, this Bill speaks more to the policing and imposition of penalties on food businesses and individuals and made no mention of the accepted conditions for rearing animals and cultivation of crops, as the Ministry of Agriculture should be doing. Food safety and prevention of food borne diseases should start from land and water, then to table. The Bill focuses more on punishing people rather than instituting ways and means to protect food at the initial stages.

Besides from being derailed from its original purpose of satisfying international standards and regulations governing the imports and exports of food, the Bill increases the already burdensome bureaucracy that hampers the establishment and operations of small businesses in Guyana.

This Bill will only serve to increase the hardship on the ordinary people, to the food vendors in and around Stabroek Market and the other markets throughout the country, to the housewives who try to supplement their husbands' income by engaging in a little catering business or the single mothers who struggle to provide for their children by using their skills to prepare food to sell on the street corners. As we know it, Guyana has always been known for its food and has never had a major problem before. So why the haste?

The whole notion of food safety is a welcome idea, once it is done in the right manner. The Food Safety Authority may seem as a good initiative, whereas it will provide jobs and ensure that food items and the safety of food in Guyana reaches the standards of consumption. However, it will

also add a huge new burden of cost to the Government to establish, employ, train and maintain the organisations.

What the Government is intending to do, through the passage of this Bill, is to set up a parallel organisation to the Food & Drug Analyst (FDA) Department of the Ministry of Public Health and to usurp the authority of the Public Health Inspectors and the Environmental Health Officers who are already functioning throughout the country within the local authority areas.

Therefore, the present Food and Drug Analyst Department that handles all aspects of food safety in Guyana will have no authority over food safety and, as such, the department will be nullified. This is because in no sense will it be feasible to operate both entities concurrently, since this will escalate to a higher costs and a greater burden on the already disadvantaged taxpayers. Also, take into consideration what would be the FDA and the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS) roles if this new entity is to be established? Would these people lose their jobs like the hundreds of Guyanese who are already on the breadline? It is recommended that, instead of the creation of a new entity, the current department and its technical capabilities should be upgraded to reach international requirements.

This Bill speaks to the establishment of at least three additional bodies. The establishment of a corporate body called the Food Safety Authority, which will be managed by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) appointed by the Minister, an Advisory Board of not more than 12 members to hold office for three years and also the Minister will constitute a National Food Safety Committee of not less than five persons or not more than ten, of which each Member shall be pay a fee to be fixed by the Minister and shall be reimbursed for reasonable travel and living expenses incurred in performing duties under this Act.

If I may ask, where will the money come from to remunerate these people, including the many inspectors the Bill speaks of as well? Has this been budgeted for in the 2017 Budget? Is this another burden on the taxpayers of this country? Is this Government not satisfied with the almost 200 new tax measures already forced upon the people of this country? Earlier, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture mentioned that there will be no significant increase in cost. However, we beg to disagree. This Bill will engage over 50 new persons, inclusive of the Inspectors. Now these people will have to be remunerated, they will, of course, receive perks and benefits.

Importantly, the Bill does not specify the issuing and renewal fees for licences, certificates, identification (IDs) or permits. Nothing in this Bill speaks to the amount of fees and other charges, but I am sure that people will have to pay. The Bill only dictates the harsh penalties and possible imprisonment for minor offenses by ordinary people trying to make a living in an already contracting economy.

My Colleague, the Hon. Mr. Lumumba, mentioned in his presentation that besides from all the burdens and bureaucracies that this Bill would require, the owner of each food handling establishment would be required to keep a register of a number of things. For example, the daily quantities of food produced, purchased, transported, distributed, name and address of each person from whom food is supplied, who transports the food and, added to that, the make type, licence number of each vehicle which transports food. Businesses do not keep buying from one supplier every single day. There are dozens of suppliers that businesses would purchase their goods from. Added is the source of ingredients used in food production and preparation and the type and quantity of packaging materials. There is a direct cost attached to this additional burden, more staff would be needed, obviously, to document and present this information, hence, carrying up the cost of the final product, which we all know will be passed onto the consumers. Yes, with the passage of this Bill the price of food will increase.

This Bill speaks to the invasion of the privacy of one's home, whereas a Magistrate, who is satisfied by proof upon oath of an Inspector, can issue a warrant authorising an Inspector to enter and search a dwelling house for the purpose of ascertaining that the provisions of this Act are not contravened. Allowing them the power to detain any person or vehicle engaged in any food business for a reasonable period, necessary to complete an inspection. This can be done at the whims and fancy of Food Inspectors. Clearly, this is a human rights violation. Added to that is the penalty of imprisonment and a fined.

Further, this Bill empowers the Minister to restrict or prohibit the importation of any food or a class of specified food. This is a very serious development and I say this in the context in which this country was governed in the past.

In conclusion, we on the Opposition side of this House are cognisant of the fact that a Food Safety Bill and the protection of people from food borne diseases is a step in the right direction.

But the People's Progressive Party will not support a Bill that seeks to provide further hardships on the taxpayers and the small entrepreneurs of this country. Hence, we ask, once again, that this Bill be sent to a Select Committee for further deliberations and to be re-modified to realise its true intentions, that is, food safety.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Dharamlall: Good evening everyone. Mr. Speaker, before I begin to share my views on the Food Safety Bill, if you permit me, I would like to, on behalf of the National Assembly, offer our condolences to the two families, one a mother and another a father, who were gunned down on the Corentyne yesterday. I hope that the next time I speak in this National Assembly, which I do hope is very soon, that for the food that I eat in Parliament, I am going to be able to trace where the oil comes from, which farm the coconut was produced on and to also be able to trace which part of which country the dhal that makes the pholourie that I eat comes from...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, it is in relation to the Bill before us. I am sure that I have not heard that.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Speaker, there is clause 59 which speaks about traceability.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please proceed. I am somewhat familiar with the Bill. Please proceed in what you have to do.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you Mr. Speaker. So having synthesised all that was said before me, I would like to focus primarily on clause 59, which speaks of traceability. But before I get deeply into traceability, I would like the Government to consider the drivers of this Bill and what drives this Bill. One of the things that I have heard coming from all of our speakers is that there is a need to conduct a gap analysis or a needs analysis to determine where the impact of this legislation lies. Therefore, the second thing that needs to be done is the conduct of an impact assessment on the different sectors that are part of the whole food sector in Guyana, so that we are better advised to legislate on behalf of people who are going to be impacted, whether in a positive or negative way.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture, in his opening statement to justify this Bill before the House, spoke of modernising agriculture and contributing to national food security and – not these same

words - enhancing a healthy people, amongst a number of other things. I am of the view that, for us to get to that point, there are a number of questions that still need to be asked and those questions, if answered in the desired way that would benefit our people, then I am fully in support of us moving forward. But I feel that, at this session, we would be unable to answer these questions and we would be unable to overcome many of the challenges and concerns that were presented during the course of the discussions and debate on this matter over the course of the evening. So I would like to bring some of my concerns to the Hon. Minister of Agriculture. The first concern has to do with the creation of a bureaucracy that seems onerous and redundant. The Food Safety Authority will be headed by a Chief Executive Officer - an administrative appointment. But there are two advisory bodies in this Act that will advise the Hon. Minister on food safety. The Advisory Board that will also be overseeing the administration of this Act and then there is a National Food Safety Committee, which some of my Colleagues before me spoke about as well, that will also be advising the Hon. Minister. These are detailed in clause 8 on the Advisory Board and in clause 25 on the National Food Safety Committee.

So I think that we have to deal with the levels of bureaucracies that seem to be the order of the day as this Government proceeds. I also am of the view, having myself been an itinerant tomato seller in West Berbice in the late 80s... So I think that this Bill is of great benefit to food consumers, but I do not think that this Bill, in the short to medium term, is of immense benefit to the food producers, food processors and the food exporters.

8.06 p.m.

So, I would like to share these concerns, like I said earlier, with the Hon. Minister and I hope that these are put into consideration and that, as the Hon. Member, Mr. Lumumba, had said earlier, that we could re-modify this Bill further to make it something that is an asset to the food sector in Guyana.

So, what are these concerns that I have? Firstly, I would like to know that, during the implementation, how will the Government treat with the fall-out, as was mentioned before, of many of the street-based, home-based and the itinerant food vendors? I know that one of the clauses spoke about home businesses and part of that clause allows a Food Inspector to go into a home on a warrant or on the direction of the Authority to investigate the food processors. It also

allows a Food Inspector to go into a home and seize equipment that one would store information or have data on. So, I am a little worried about what mechanisms are there to ensure that the implementation modalities do not disrespect the rights of producing, of existing and of employment of many of these food vendors.

The second thing that I would like to also share with the Hon. Minister is: How will the Government deal with the imminent fall out as a result of export requirements? I see this Food Safety Bill as a non-tariff barrier and even a non-trade concern to some extent, specifically, on the issue of traceability. Guyana is a net food producing country and our excesses are exported. In some cases, for some of our sectors like rice and sugar, we export more than we locally consume. So, it is important that this issue of traceability becomes profound in our understanding of the impact of this Food Safety Bill.

On the matter of traceability, every single ingredient or input into a final product, the origin has to be defined, including the fertiliser, the pesticides and the seed. Every single aspect of the production process and every single component of the final product have to have a defined origin. I am not certain that, at this point in time, in 2017, in Guyana, that despite our glorious thought of wanting to have a Food Safety Bill to make a modern agricultural sector, that we can meet some of the requirements that we are setting for ourselves.

I recalled when the issue of traceability became very popular, and the Hon. Minister of Foreign Trade could probably elaborate more on this, during the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in Europe, when we were exporting rice, this matter was amongst a number of other concerns that we had to treat with. Traceability can actually move us out of many of our markets for rice, sugar and many other products, including the non-traditional. So, in that regard, I would like to also ask what mechanisms are in place to mitigate against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's)? The Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj, earlier spoke about the impact of GMOs on our competitiveness. That many times, when Guyana is exporting a product, it is exporting a commodity and that commodity competes with a commodity from another country or a product from another country. I would like also that even before we move forward with this Bill becoming law, that the Parliamentary Select Committee that others have proposed, and I will propose that this Bill be sent to, that this issue of the GMO and the impact of the GMO on our

agriculture, a policy specific to genetically modified organisms, also be contemplated and agreed upon.

Further, I would like to also share some concerns regarding national employment. When there is a fall out, and many before me spoke about the loss of opportunities, the loss of jobs and so forth, what impact has been done to measure the effect on national employment, as a result of an implementation of this Bill? What are the quantitative and economic terms that have been considered in increased food production during the course of designing this Bill? Regarding exports, what are the quantitative and economic terms that have been defined on the matter of exports?

I would also like for deep and profound consideration to be given to the impact of a food safety law on local food prices. My worry is that, as we are proceeding to have this Bill moved into law, we may be legislating many of our small businesses out of business, legislating them out of competition and that is a cause for concern. It is because there are thousands of people, and as the Hon. Member, Mr. Lumumba, and others have said, there are thousands of small vendors, food vendors, in this country who depend on a given evening for a daily bread. So, how are we going to be treating with when they cannot meet many of the requirements set out in this Food Safety Bill? What is going to happen to their cause?

We have to also look too at the impact this will have on our Amerindian people. I know for example, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs hosts September Heritage Month. Also, having deep and intense knowledge of the interior of Guyana, I am aware too that many of our Amerindian people are also involved in food production, food processing and food sale and distribution. So, how are we going to be treating with our hinterland people? Are we going to be asking those who come to the Heritage Month activities and are selling their piwari, fly, casiri and so forth, to produce a Food Handlers Certificate? Are we going to ask them to produce the traceability parameters, including which farm the cassava was grown on and which area the wild cane was grown on? So, these are considerations that we all need to put on the table before we can legislate to drive business, rather than legislate to drive away business.

I would like the Ministry of Agriculture to be able to present, maybe, what are the international obligations that we have by-market and by-product, for example, that rice to Europe would have

different entry requirements, than rice going to Mexico, than rice going to the Dominican Republic, than rice going to the Caribbean. This is because I know that CROSQ is the standards body that we use to trade rice in the Caribbean. So, by-product and by-market, what are our international obligations? I am asking these things because my worry is that we are going to be legislating ourselves out of business, out of production and out of export. The effect in the short and medium term, especially as it regards clause 59, is going to affect our production, our supply, our capacity to produce and our reliability as a producing and exporting country.

I would also like the Minister of Agriculture to tell the House, as we continue to contemplate this Bill into law, how we will make our manufacturing of Guyana's products fair with competition from subsidised and GMO food products and substitutes from competitive exporters. Let us use rice, again, for example. We could also use sugar, but sugar is already a national concern which is engaging attention elsewhere. For example, when we export rice to Europe, we are competing with the United States of America which is number two in Europe, with India's rice, with rice from Thailand and with Pakistan's basmati.

So, on the Global Market, we have to understand what the requirements are; that our competitors are also having the same requirements that we ought to have to enter some of the markets that we are now competing in. This is because we used to have preferential markets. Those markets in Europe are no more. The only thing that is saving us in the Caribbean is the Common External Tariff and even so, there are extra regional suppliers who can supply food products into the Caribbean, as the Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj mentioned, at prices much less than the prices that we have coming out of Guyana and even within the countries of the Caribbean. So, I think great and more detailed thought need to be put to this aspect.

Again too, one of the success stories of agriculture in Guyana has to do with satellite farming or satellite production and this is probably best exemplified in the poultry sector, where small farms produce and supply to the bigger processors. So, what considerations have been given to satellite farming *vis-à-vis* this issue of traceability? Where did the corn come from? Where did the soya come from? Where did the feed additives come from? So, more consideration needs to go into this and the reason for all of this too, is that if these satellite farms cannot meet these requirements, they are going to be licensed out of business, legislated out of business and when businesses close, people lose jobs and we live in a country where jobs are very scarce, and when

jobs are very scarce, crime becomes prevalent and when crime becomes prevalent our society starts to decay further.

So, as I move on, I did also mention the impact on Amerindian and hinterland production and the trade of agricultural products. I would like to re-emphasise that, because that is an aspect of our economy that has tremendous potential and we have to ensure that the cassareep that comes out from Surama, where the Vice President is from, or the eggs, the chicken or the cattle that come out of there that we are able to produce... [Mr. Patterson: The *lil* girls.] I do not know about *lil* girls, you have to tell me about it.

Mr. Speaker, did you hear Mr. Patterson speaking something about little girls? Does he have a penchant for little girls?

8.21 p.m.

As I continue, I would also like to find out what the impact of imported food inputs on local production would be. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, there are many foods that we produce which require inputs from overseas. How is this Bill treating with the inputs that we import from overseas?

In trade, there is the issue of non-trade concerns. If, for example, we produce a kilogramme of 'X' food and we are ready to export that food and we meet the requirements, but, when another country has to export to us, and, for some stretch of the imagination, this Bill, which would certainly become a law in the future, does not allow a product from another country to come into Guyana, I shudder to think what effect a trade war would have on agriculture in Guyana. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture spoke very eloquently and with great evidence that agriculture is one of the biggest sectors in our country, contributing probably more than 20% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask you, as we consider this Bill, what the corresponding non-trade and non-tariff requirements of products imposed in our country would be. This also ties in with the whole issue of traceability.

When we meet all of these things, including paying additional fees for licences and maybe penalties, if we do not meet the requirements of our licences, who is going to bear the cost of all

of this? I would like, therefore, to ask if the Hon. Minister has considered whether this Food Safety Bill would cause an increase in the price of food on the local market.

Every Sunday, I am at the Plaisance line top buying black pudding. I intend to go Sunday coming to tell the black pudding lady, from whom I buy in Plaisance, that tougher times are coming for her. She knows already.

When I was growing up in Berbice and attending the No. 8 Primary School, I used to sell icicle and *flutie*. I am wondering whether the *salse* and sugar cake ladies would have to get licences to produce in their houses if they live next door to a school and sell to the school children. I think that Comrade Irfaan Ali used to sell sugar cakes as well. These are important considerations.

Mr. Lumumba spoke about the context of our small food vendors versus our big food processors. In my research on food safety, I found that, often times, food safety benefits the bigger *guys* at the expense of the smaller *guys*. That is something that I think, Mr. Speaker, in your esteemed position as Speaker of this House, I am sure would be of concern to you as well.

This Food Safety Bill defines what a fish slaughter house is. I am wondering, too, if the man who rides around on a bicycle, Hon. Prime Minister, selling catfish and kwakwari cannot stop in front of my yard for me to buy some catfish and kwakwari from him. He would be selling it directly from his bicycle. Is his bicycle now going to be considered a fish slaughter house, Hon. Minister?

As we are speaking of fish, I notice that nowhere in this Bill does it harmonise the Fisheries Act, especially inland fishery, as well as the Veterinary Act, which controls the movement of offal and animal parts from different parts of the country to the coastland. Many of the Members on the Government side would not know about this, but I worked on it when I was at the Ministry of Agriculture. So, I am profoundly knowledgeable about this. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let the Member issue his statement without so much interruption. I notice that the two front benches are very much occupied with matters other than which is taking place here. It seems to me that some Members of the two front benches are otherwise

occupied, but please do not disturb the others, if you must be otherwise occupied. Hon. Member, you have four minutes remaining.

Mr. Dharamlall: That is more than enough for me, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your protection.

As part of food consumption and as part of the former food producing aspect of my life, I would like to find out from the Hon. Minister what is going to be the new pricing structure of the different food commodities that we have in this country as a result of the impact of the fertilizer regime, pesticide regime and many of the regimes on imported inputs that we are going to have.

Finally, I believe in young, brilliant professionals and I believe that our country can only benefit from their service. So, my worry and my concern have to do with whether the young professional, Mr. Marlan Cole, who is the head of the Government Analyst Food and Drug Department (GA-FDD), is going to lose his job because many of these functions are now going to be dissolved in that Department and moved to the Ministry of Agriculture, under the Food Safety Authority.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think that you know that you ought not to mention names here. You were out of order. I believe that you should put yourself right or take your seat. Please proceed.

Mr. Dharamlall: I withdraw the name. Again, I ask: because of all that is taking place and the functions being removed from the Government Analyst Food and Drug Department, what would be the status of that Department and what would be the status of the professional staff of that Department?

Before I close, I would like to recommend that this Bill be sent to a parliamentary special select committee. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Trotman]: I rise to make an intervention on behalf of the Government and in support of the Minister of Agriculture. This Bill, the Food Safety Bill 2016, Bill No. 22 of 2016, is really a companion to the Bill that we just referred to a special select committee and that is the Animal Welfare Bill. This Bill, if I may quote from its title, is intended:

“...to prevent the spread of food borne diseases through the control of the production, preparation, handling, storage and transportation of food and provide for connected matters.”

Some of us may not want this Bill but we all have to be in agreement that we need this Bill. I am, like my Colleagues not only on this side, but those in the House, those who are in the Public Gallery and those who are listening and looking at us, somewhat confused. It is because we sense some ambivalence on the side of the Opposition. Some say they reject the Bill. Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, who seemed to have had a makeover, praised the Bill and, in fact, said that he had just a few ingredients to add to an otherwise good Bill. Then, we had that they are going to oppose this Bill but asked that it be sent to a special select committee. Forgive me if there is, in my view, some ambivalence coming from the Opposition benches. I believe that it is because conscience and a sense of what is right seems to have invaded the minds of those Members.

There is a genre of Bills that, in a sense, has national import. They are not really political or partisan Bills which promote a specific policy of a specific government of the day. They are Bills which are intended to improve the welfare of the people, intended to ensure that our children are safe, intended to ensure that the elderly are well taken care of and intended to ensure that animals are treated in a humane way. These Bills being debated this evening fall into that category. This is why I believe there is some confusion. It is because conscience dictates that a Bill that states that matters of food, transportation and production should be regulated and regularised is a step in the national and right direction.

I just wish, in brief remarks, to say a few things. This Bill, when it is passed – and I have no doubt it would be passed into law, if not tonight, after it goes to committee... Who knows what the Minister of Agriculture may have in his good bag of options that he has before him When this Bill is passed, it would bring Guyana into harmony with the rest of the Caribbean and sister CARICOM countries. This talk about the *Chicken Little* syndrome that the sky is falling and things are about to disintegrate and collapse in Guyana due to this Bill, and that poor people are going to suffer, is nothing of the sort.

Like the Bill that came before, we are just bringing ourselves into conformity with CARICOM standards. We are coming into harmony with what other territories are doing. It is so that, as a nation and as a region, we can relate internationally.

It is not far-fetched to imagine that, with the speed at which diseases and illness travel – water-borne and through contaminated food with modern travel – a disease or contaminated material could leave one jurisdiction and come to Guyana. We are importing food and fruits, even fish. I am told that hassar comes from abroad. Tamarind comes from abroad. Pineapple is imported into Guyana. It is not far-fetched, therefore, to expect that we can be afflicted later on.

As I said, this Bill, being the companion to the Bill that came before, which was referred to a special select committee, the Animal Welfare Bill... I have to say that the days of castrating goats and disembowelling sheep in the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall are over. Then, the meat was sent to some place to be sold as *goat manish water*, or stew or *patonie*. Those days are over. These two Bills are going to ensure that, when one is playing basketball, one is not disturbed by shrieking goats and sheep *mehing* because they are being disembowelled. Those days are over, Ms. Teixeira.

One of the primary threats to effective food safety control in Guyana is the fragmented administration of responsibilities. Various duties reside within different Ministries and Departments and there are no formal linkages. Rightfully so, the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, asked about the other agencies which exist. This Bill seeks to bring some attention to that and to cure an obvious mischief and that is that there are a number of corresponding agencies, all operating in silos, that issue food handlers certificates.

8.36 p.m.

There are the Public Health Ordinance, the City Hall, the Regional Democratic Council and the Ministry of Public Health which have separate responsibilities. This Bill seeks to consolidate those functions. It may not be the final step but certainly it is the first and a good step in that direction. This absence of cohesion has often resulted in inefficient use of scarce human and material resources that inevitably spawn a lack of consumer confidence in the food system. Invariably, consumers are confused since it is unclear which department should address their concerns.

As we mature as a nation, as the Hon. Minister of Agriculture mentioned earlier, we are about to produce oil. We are producing more gold. There is more interest in Guyana. People are coming by the dozens and hundreds. We have to rise in our standards. Whilst some of us may wish to champion the cause of the powers of Regent Street and those pholourie sellers, icicle and tomato sellers... They are good people. They are the salt and earth of this country. We salute Mr. Dharamlall with his tomato sales and his icicle sales.

An elderly woman, many years ago in my early political life, said to me, "We like when you are around and amongst us but we want to see you up there helping us to get up with you." It is important that, when we are elected to office or the highest decision-making body in the land, we must not only say that these people shall remain or that we have no duty or responsibility to lift their standards. While they want us to ensure that they have a good life and a progressive life, they expect us to pass laws in their best interest. They know that not everything will be palatable in the beginning but they know that, ultimately, our cause is good and our intentions are good. Our intention and our desire are to raise their standards of living. The black pudding lady, the woman who makes plantain chips who, I believe, was featured in the newspapers last Sunday, who, out of circumstances, being without income, started bagging plantain chips and labelling them with her daughters, are the people that we are reaching out to. If it is that you have a cottage industry, the Inspectors should be able to enter your butchery; they should be able to enter your kitchen to see under what conditions you are preparing food for our children.

The Hon. Minister of Education can tell us about those frequent outbreaks of illnesses, mysterious as they are, where school children are sent home. Twenty school children have gone home because they ingested some icicle. I do not know who sold them the icicle but they may have had something during the break. We should be able to say exactly who sold those children, at that particular school, that meal at the lunch time or the break, whether it was pholourie or egg ball, whatever it was, we must be able to trace and to find whether it was the flour or whether it was the handling that caused that illness.

This Bill is a Bill in the right direction. It is a Bill in the national interest and we ask for support. I do not intend to be very long. As I said, it equally seeks to protect consumers from unscrupulous food establishment operators and food handlers who might want to commit fraud

through the handling of their food, through false labelling, through false expiry dates, incorrect ingredients list and false and injurious additives.

Further, the Bill provides for the inspection of imported and exported foods so as to ensure that they achieve modern, acceptable international standards at a composition, chemical and micro biological analysis, packaging and labelling. Equally, this Bill, as I said, is meant to assist vendors and manufacturers and those small persons who wish to enter into this business. They must know that there are standards and that, when people come to our shore, whether as visitors or workers, they must know that there is a standard to which they shall be treated - with respect - because we treat ourselves with respect. [*Interruption*] Therefore, I crave, at this late hour, your protection from the endless babbling sound in the front bench.

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, would you resume your seat?

I have not named a Member in this House but Members must not feel that I am unwilling to do so. I will hope that Members who occupy senior places in this House will so conduct themselves as their responsibilities oblige them to. Please proceed, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Trotman: I will bring relief to those who are obviously irritated by the truth and are distressed by mentioning 12 points that I consider salient to this Bill: first, food safety tentacles reach far into our society because of their importance at the forefront of safe-guarding what we eat to survive.

Second, food safety is not only about the wholesomeness of what we eat but the processes by which these are carried out to produce what we eat, the additives that are mixed into them, the materials that are used to package them, the time and temperature at which these are sold and consumed.

Thirdly, a wider array of regulations must be instituted as we seek to make this integrated body into a world class regulatory framework - world class, Hon. Member Teixeira.

Fourth, consumers will have to be protected against food fraud, as I mentioned, against false labelling, false expiry dates, incorrect ingredient list and false and injurious additives to food.

Fifth, imported foods will have to be monitored to ensure that they achieve modern, acceptable international standards as to composition, chemical and micro biological analysis, packaging and labelling.

Sixth, local food production will also be held to the stringent international standards to ensure that we not only achieve acceptability for export markets, but also ensure that Guyanese at home are offered the highest quality of food.

Seventh, manufacturing entities, warehouses, market places, restaurants and other public eating places and street food vendors will all be held to these international standards. I believe that if it is done in the right way where they are consulted and training is provided, they, in turn, will thank us for assisting them.

Eighth, a long list of regulations will have to follow but we will begin with this legislation. As I said, it is not an end but it is the beginning of a journey. These will govern the production, bottling, transportation and sale of water, including the set international standards for potable water. Water is usually, as we know, the base for the manufacturing process of food.

Ninth, food production from the farm to the table will be monitored and regulated to ensure that consumers' health is always protected.

Tenth, the use of fertilisers and pesticides will, of course, be monitored and regulated.

Eleventh, regulations following the international standards of good agricultural practices will be implemented and monitored.

Lastly, fruits and vegetables will be monitored from the time of planting through reaping and post-harvest handling, transportation storage and placing for sale for micro biological and chemical quality and traceability.

With this said, I have no hesitation in supporting this Bill. Whether it is passed tonight or, as I said, the good Minister sees it fit, not because there have been cries for it to go there but perhaps open it up for more consultation as a select committee, he has the full support of the Government and we commend the Bill to the House. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members, I too rise to make my contribution to the Food Safety Bill 2016. I want to assure the Hon. Minister Trotman that there is no ambiguity on this side of the House. We are very clear, in our minds, food safety is important to this country. That is why, if you had listened to Hon. Minister Holder, you would have seen that the process of formulating this Bill took quite a long time. In fact, we had drafted the legislation. However, there were a number of things that we felt we had to discuss and include in the legislation and we thought that it should benefit from a fuller consultation process, which we were not able to do. That is why bringing the Bill to the House is commendable but we should allow the Bill to go through that process of consultation.

As the Hon. Member, Dr. Ramsaran, would have said, there are a number of commendable parts in this Bill but there also deficiencies in the Bill. That is what we want to point out. We hope that by, taking it to a special select committee, we will be able to enhance the Bill, strengthen it and make it even more wholesome for the Guyanese public.

One of the first things that one would notice from this Bill is that it seeks to remove food from the Food and Drug Act, Chapter 34:03, No. 10 of 1977, and we are now placing that under a different authority called the food safety authority. Again, we are moving it from the Ministry of Public Health and we are now taking it under the Ministry of Agriculture. Policing food or monitoring food for safety standards has been with the Ministry of Public Health or Ministry of Health before for close to 46 years. We have never had any major outbreaks.

When the Hon. Minister Holder spoke, he mentioned that one of his primary reasons is that he would like to prevent fragmentation and he is advocating consolidation of a number of institutions. However, when we look at the back of this Bill, all we are talking about is consolidating or removing food from under Food and Drugs but we have not shown how livestock, under the Livestock Authority Bill, will be coming over or the other departments that Hon. Minister Holder mentioned. A lot of those areas are governed by separate legislation. For example, there is the Veterinary Public Health which is under the Ministry of Public Health. How will that relate to this new entity? There is the Food Analyst Department. How will that relate to this new entity? There is no explanation. Throughout the legislation, there is no explanation.

Under the Ministry of Agriculture, the Livestock Development Agency is now supposed to be a part of this authority. The Plant Health and Animal Health are also supposed to come under this authority but none of this is explicitly explained in this Bill as to how it will come under this authority and removing it from under those other legislation and bringing it under this authority. You are moving food from Food and Drugs and putting it under this authority.

For example, one of the most important things that we have to look at when we are talking about food is whether there are residues of pesticides coming into our food. Perhaps there is some role for the Toxic Chemical and Pesticides Control Board. It probably would have been dealing with some of these matters but there is no mention or connection between the Toxic Chemicals and Pesticides Board and what this new agency will do.

The Bill mentions the Codex Alimentarius which is the international body that governs standards relating to food. The Codex Alimentarius, as I understand it, is under the Guyana Bureau of Standards. It is not found under the Ministry of Agriculture nor under the Ministry of Public Health. Therefore, there still is, even with the formation of this agency that is supposed to be a stand-alone agency to govern food in our country, fragmentation.

8.51 p.m.

The principal reason advocated by the Minister, that is, to end fragmentation and put all the aspects of food under one authority, has not been accomplished as yet by this Bill because all these things are still in separate institutions. So, that is one of the things that we have to do.

The Minister also mentioned, in his opening statements, that it is important for us to harmonise with international trade treaties, with what the WTO is doing, the standards that exist internationally under the Codex Alimentarius and so forth and we totally agree with that. However, the model legislation that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) would have advocated is not the one we are considering today. In fact, three different models have been proposed as model legislation and it differs significantly from what we are considering today. What we have here is bits and pieces taken from our existing legislation and bits and pieces taken from maybe some of these models, and we have put them together to perhaps make our own kind of 'cook-up' legislation here. But it is not perhaps reaching out to the kinds of function

that we would like it to do. So, we agree with harmonisation but we have to ensure that these things are in here.

If this new entity that is going to be created is going to be talking about food, then I think the name of the authority needs to be broader because we are talking about a food safety authority but really when we put all these pieces together, it should be more like a food administration authority of which food safety is a subcomponent under that bigger rubric. And that is something that is very important because the experts in the field would tell you that food safety is very narrow. And while we agree that we should have food safety legislation, if we are going to go in this direction, then perhaps we need to rename the authority. The point has already been made and that is that we are creating the stand-alone authority – the cost of it. Where are the moneys going to come from?

Now, I heard that perhaps some of these units already exist; so maybe when we coalesce them, we are going to take moneys from these institutions and put it there. But is this going to be enough? The functions that are being advocated for this unit is of a much wider mandate that is given to them, where we want them to look from the processes from the farms right up, as somebody said, to your plate. Therefore, that continuum is a larger continuum of things that we have not been doing before. Therefore, the start-up cost is going to be tremendous because now we are going to have to find new staff and a new level of bureaucracy will be added. So, while we probably leave the drug and cosmetics with what used to be food and drugs and we are taking food and putting it into a separate unit, this unit will have to get staff, food analyst and inspectors; so a separate inspectorate is now being created. And now, we will have an army of people that we will have to get there and we have to pay them. Where is this money going to come from? Was that money budgeted for in the 2017 Budget or perhaps we have to come back here for supplementary funding? I do not know.

Two boards are going to be created. The first one is a board that would now govern this new authority that we are setting up and the difficulty that I have with this particular board is that the authority to appoint all the members of the board is under the sole discretion of the Minister. Something must be fundamentally wrong with this because we have brought legislation to this House where we recognised that, in a multi-agency coordination kind of activity such as this, there are statutory units or statutory agencies that must have a place on the board and it is not left

at the discretion of the Minister. And what we have here is that this would be totally at the discretion of the Minister.

Then, if one goes back and checks the Food and Drug Act, what is there is that a Food Advisory Committee was provided for, and so it seems that we have brought over from that legislation the Food Advisory Committee to this legislation, but then there are contradictions between what this Food Advisory Committee is going to do versus what the board is going to be doing. The terms of reference for these two Committees are sometimes the same. So, this is something that we have to look at. Again, if we look at what is now called the National Food Safety Committee, the Minister has the sole discretion of appointing those persons to the Committee. It is not only that; this Committee does not have any relationship with this board that we are talking about or this entity that we are talking about. So, on one hand, there is an entity that is governing the process from food production right up to consumption and then there is a stand-alone advisory body that advises the Minister on issues relating to food that has no connection with this entity. So, something is wrong with that: they are appointed by the Minister; they take instructions from the Minister and they report to the Minister. I do not know why we want to do that. If we are going to enhance what this body is doing, then we would want a Committee that is going to be working along with this entity.

In other structures, there are subcommittees of the board. In other jurisdictions and in other pieces of food legislation, it is important to have Scientific Committees that can advise on various technical aspects of this food production. Unfortunately, this National Food Safety Committee that we are talking about does not give one the impression that it will be providing this type of scientific advice.

Those other legislation where it talks of scientific committees, it is important that we have subcommittees that deal with things such as food additives and flavouring because some of these can be harmful to people's health. And in this Bill, we are very silent on some of those things.

Pesticides and antibiotics residues: While Minister Holder flagged antibiotic residue as an important aspect of this food chain, in the Bill itself, it is not very explicit. And so one is left to wonder how we are going to address these issues when proper regulations were not made to deal with them.

Biological hazards: Again, in other jurisdictions, they will make special subcommittees to address these things and contaminants in the food chain; these are things that are normally done. Unfortunately, our Bill did not explicitly spell out these matters. [Mr. Patterson: And

what about nuclear waste?] And that too. Hon. Minister Patterson is talking about nuclear waste. If he would have read recently on the United States, he would have seen, on the pacific coast, that some of the species of fish that are turning up there are actually contaminated by the incidence in Japan. So, it is a valid point.

One of the things done in modern food legislation is to talk about a holistic approach and that is this farm-to-table approach. And the intention in that approach is not to penalise or punish people; rather, the objective is to work with various stakeholders along this chain so that we can educate them and ensure that they adapt best practices. Incentives are given to them to adapt to this new culture. In fact, what has happened is that their standards, like the good agricultural practices, good manufacturing practices, and good manufacturing practices that can be adopted and in those countries where these practices have been adopted, it is said that most, but not all, of these food hazards can be controlled in the food chain. There are also many international norms and standards for these areas that we can adapt. And again, while mention was made of it, it is not very explicit in the Bill. So, I think what we need to do is an audit to see where we are, where are the deficiencies, and what we need to do to comply with these international norms. And then focus on the gaps so that we can strengthen where we are weak.

Unfortunately, what has happened is, in this particular Bill that is before us, it is replete with a number of offences and punishments. In going through the Bill, I found close to 28 different offences and penalties. And they range from maybe \$20,000 to up to \$100,000. In some cases, it is just a fine and, in other cases, it is a fine plus a jail term. In some cases, it is as much as six months' imprisonment. So, we have to look back at some of these offences. When one goes back to the Food and Drug Administration Act, provisions were made for first and second offences. So, in the first offence, it is milder and, if an offence is recommitted, then larger punishments are put on the offenders.

My Colleagues would have mentioned some of the things, like the food handler's certificate, that have to be paid for. But I want to touch on the issue of food vending. I have no problem with people having to go and get a certificate to certify that he or she is free from diseases when

handling and/or selling food. [Ms. Teixeira: That is required already.] And that is already required. But where the problem is and which this Bill does not contemplate is that, in a lot of the locations where food is being sold on the streets, around the surroundings are sometimes unhygienic practices. Sometimes, the water is being recycled – one container may be there with water and a plate is being washed right there along with another thing. And so, that is very unhygienic. This Bill does not make any provision to fix those things and those are the points where people can get infected because, from an infected plate, another person can get infected and things like that. So, while the intention of the Bill is good, there are some of the things that need to be tweaked to make sure that they are fixed.

A lot of what is here is really focused more on the retail side of things – when people are selling in a shop or people are vending and so forth. But for the rest of the food chain that we are talking about - because this new approach that we are talking about is from the field right up to when it is being consumed... We are just focusing on one end of the spectrum and that is the retail end. And a lot of the other processes we have not looked at in any detail.

9.06 p.m.

In fact, the legislation is very ambiguous on many of those points in the chain. That is something we need to fix.

When I look at clause 90, there is the heading, “General penalty”. As if the 28 or more penalties I found in the Bill were not enough, under General Penalty, this is what it states:

“Where no penalty is provided for an offence committed under this Act such offence shall upon summary conviction be punishable by a fine of twenty thousand dollars and imprisonment for six months.”

So, if no offence was found, this is a catch-all clause that has been introduced.

Under clause 91, the Bill deals with the kinds of Regulations that the Minister could work on. Clause 91(3) states:

“Any person who commits an offence under any regulation shall upon summary conviction be punishable by a fine of fifteen thousand dollars and imprisonment for four months.”

My understanding is that a lot of the Regulations are an enlargement, an extension of what exists in the legislation. Here in the body of the legislation, we are talking about \$20,000 and six months imprisonment in a mild case and, in a more extreme case, we are talking about \$100,000 and six months imprisonment. When we come to the Regulations, the Regulations state that, for the various offences, it is \$15,000 and four months imprisonment. Perhaps, when the Minister would speak again, he would help to answer this conundrum that is here.

Also, in the Bill, it states that there are a number of permits one would have to get – certificates, identification cards and so on. You would have heard about the street vending permit, the food handler’s permit, street food vending identification card, food handler’s identification card, a licence to operate and exporters need food safety certificates. What is missing in all of this is how much these permits, licences and certificates would cost. Or is it going to be free? If it is not free, then, can the Minister explain what mechanism he would be using to determine these fees? Would the public be consulted on these matters and, if so, when would the consultations be held?

I understand right now that, under the Food and Drug Administration, importers and manufacturers are required to have annual permits. Apparently, there is a food import permit which costs about \$20,000 per annum, a food manufacturer’s permit which costs \$5,000 per annum and, for cottage industries, there is a permit that costs \$1,500 per annum. I have not seen any of these requirements or permits in the new legislation. Am I to assume that these permits have been abolished and that they are now free or, perhaps, is this going to be published somewhere else? Maybe the Minister would be able to tell us.

A few of my Colleagues on this side raised the important question of genetically modified foods. In the Bill, it sets out a requirement that we have to use for genetically modified food that has to satisfy the requirements of the National Bureau of Standards. I took the liberty, in preparing for this debate, of calling the Bureau of Standards and asking whether it has any standard relating to genetically modified foods. The answer I got was that it does not have national standards. Here it is that we do not have standards. If the importers breach this part of the Bill, they could be fined

or jailed for a breach of this clause of the Bill. This is a very important matter which we need to fix.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have four minutes remaining.

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Speaker, I come to clause 84(1). When we look at that clause, it states to whom an outbreak must be reported. Right now, when there is an outbreak, it is reported to the Chief Medical Officer. This Bill is now imposing another authority. That is, the outbreak has to be reported to the Chief Medical Officer, this new authority or the Chief Veterinary Officer. But there is no provision for coordination among these entities. In some cases, if there is no way of coordinating, what could very well happen is that somebody drops the ball and this could create a difficulty with the investigation and, subsequently, the remedying of the problem. Some of these functions for the investigation of outbreaks already reside in the Ministry of Public Health. I cannot understand why this new entity that is to be set up would want to trespass on what already exists.

This Bill also provides, at clause 89, that every registered medical practitioner and analyst has to report to the authority or the Chief Medical Officer any incident of food-related illnesses encountered in their duties. Right now, the passive surveillance system in the public health system is probably overburdened. The timeliness with which these reports are made, I do not know that we could use such a system to respond appropriately to food outbreaks. This is another clause we have to look at.

When one looks at the opening of the Bill, it states:

“AN ACT to prevent the spread of food borne diseases through the control of the production, preparation, handling, storage and the transportation of food and provide for connected matters.”

There is no doubt that anybody with a sane mind would want to oppose something like this. But, when the Bill is examined in detail, there are a lot of gaps which we have to correct. I think the Minister and his Colleagues, we all, should take this Bill to a select committee where we could examine it in more detail and help to fix some of these matters so that we could strengthen food safety in this country.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Holder (replying): Mr. Speaker, in the regional context, the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM) is, at present, concluding its Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Project, executed by IICA and funded by the 10 European Development Fund (EDF). This SPS project sought to strengthen the food safety systems in the CARICOM countries. Guyana is moving apace with the rest of the Caribbean in implementing the model legislation for agricultural health and food safety developed through this project. This honourable House has already debated and passed the preceding two Bills in 2011; they are now the Animal Health and the Plant Health Acts. We now bring before you the Food Safety Bill to complete the upgrade of the food safety system and to bring Guyana on par with the rest of the region and the world at large.

These measures are not only designed to allow our countries to produce safe food, but also to develop new markets for our produce while permitting us to achieve food security in the region. CARICOM created the Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency (CAHFSA) through the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. This body being the ultimate clearing house for agricultural health and food safety matters within the CARICOM system. Guyana was recently represented at a meeting in Barbados to validate the recommendations by the consultants for a coordinating mechanism for agricultural health and food safety systems in each member state and then across the region as a whole through CAHFSA. We have already implemented most of the recommendations and are now stepping ahead by the formation of this food safety authority.

When formed, the food safety authority will bring to bear a novel approach to food safety and will impact positively on the health of the nation and the way other people see us. The farm-to-fork approach will definitely bring about better control over the quality of produce offered for sale to consumers and implement traceability, especially in the high-risk fresh fruits and vegetables sector. All the recommended Codex standards will be implemented over time. Our whole approach and relationship to the Codex Alimentarius Commission will have to change. The Codex Alimentarius or Food Code is all about food safety and, thus, will be on the forefront of our international engagements. If we are to effect change in our systems and our way of handling food, then we will have to follow the international guidelines as established by Codex.

In the area of trade, special attention will have to be given to the rules of the World Trade Organization, especially the sanitary and phytosanitary measures which lay the basic rule for trade to avoid Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). Keen attention will be paid to ensure that Guyana is compliant with the SPS measures. Keen attention will also be paid to compliance with the conditions imposed by the Food Safety Modernization Act of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to ensure that Guyana's food and agricultural produce meet the requirements by that law.

In summary, the Food Safety Bill, in its entirety, would assist in the prevention of food borne diseases through the control of the production, preparation, handling, storage and transportation of food. It would also coordinate and regulate the fragmented system for food safety in Guyana, alleviate the high levels of diarrheal diseases in children under five and promote more market opportunities for producers.

The food safety authority would provide for the consolidation of various inspectorates from the Guyana Livestock Development Authority, the Veterinary Public Health, the Municipality, the Food and Drugs Department, the Plant Health and Environmental Health. There would be no significant increase in costs. Initially, moneys would be appropriated from the parent agencies.

In conclusion, bearing in mind the concerns expressed by Hon. Members of the Opposition and in pursuit of unanimity in support of this very important Bill to prevent placing in jeopardy our export potential in agricultural products, I move that the Food Safety Bill 2016, Bill No. 22 of 2016, be read for a second time and referred to a special select committee of this honourable House for further consideration. Thank you.

9.21 p.m.

Bill read the second time and referred to a Special Select Committee.

COMMITTEES BUSINESS

MOTION

FOURTH PERIODIC REPORT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SECTORAL COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Fourth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations be adopted.” [*Minister of Business - Chairperson of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations*]

Minister of Business [Mr. Gaskin]: If I may, I wish to move a motion for this House to adopt the Fourth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations. I believe it is appropriate for me, on behalf of that Committee, to give this House a brief overview of the work of the Committee during the period identified under the report, which is September 9th, 2015 until November 16th, 2016.

The composition of the Committee, I think I should identify the Hon. Members. From the A Partnership of National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), Government side, are myself, Hon. Minister Ms. Lawrence, Hon. Member Mr. Rajkumar, Hon. Member Mr. Adams, Hon. Minister Ms. Henry and from the (PPP/C), the Opposition side, are the Hon. Member Teixeira, Ms. Hon. Member Selman, Hon. Member Mr. Mustapha and Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall. Those are the Members of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee.

The first order of business of the Committee, at its first meeting on September 9th 2015, was to elect the Chairperson and the Vice Chairperson. It was done in accordance with Standing Order 86(3) which provides for the four sectoral Committees to have a chairperson and a deputy chairperson in such a way that two of the Committees are chaired by a Member of the Government side and two of those Committees are chaired by a Member from the Opposition. Where there is a Chairperson from the Government side, there is a Deputy Chairperson from the Opposition side, *vice versa*. That was done and the Committee elected Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira as its Chairperson with me as Vice Chairperson.

The Committee then set out to setup a work programme which is outlined in Appendix III of the report, in keeping with the mandate of the Committee which is to scrutinise, examine all policies of the administration and to determine whether the execution of Government policies in consonance with the principle of good governance and in the best interest of all the people of Guyana. The work programme sets out various areas of scrutiny and it identifies 20 activities which would take the Committee through the Eleventh Parliament. The areas of scrutiny

included foreign aid, defence and territorial integrity, diplomatic relations, national security in civil defence, public information, Commonwealth, Organisation of American States (OAS), Organisation of Islamic Conferences and Rio Group, bilateral cooperation, national security, United Nations (UN), foreign trade conference and trade development. Those were the areas that were identified and, as I said, 20 activities were planned for this Parliament.

I want to give you some of the highlights of the work of the Committee over the year. I think I speak on behalf of the Committee when I say that the highlights of the year were enlightening engagements that we had with two of our Ministers, namely the Hon. Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Greenidge and, my colleague next to me, the Hon. Minister of Citizenship Mr. Felix who made themselves available to the Committee and made presentations to the Committee on matters of interest and matters of national importance.

The first such engagement was on the subject of Guyana's maritime boundaries and included presentation on Guyana's maritime entitlement under international and domestic law as well as another presentation on maritime delineation and delimitation issue between Guyana and its neighbours, Venezuela and Suriname. The Committee, I believe, learned a lot from those presentations and we wish to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs who with his team made those presentations to us and they were kind enough to answer a number of questions the Committee had on these matters.

The next engagement was on the matter of Guyana's Partial Scope Agreement with Brazil. Again, this was also a very enlightening engagement. The Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as his team brought to the Committee's attention a number of interesting revelations. We learnt that the agreement first came into effect of May 2004 and that it was established to foster bilateral trade flows by the exchange of tariff preferences between the parties. We learnt also that it was specifically intended to facilitate the participation of the private sector and its activities. The agreement entailed a list of items that Guyana would export to Brazil and *vice versa* a list of items that Brazil could export to Guyana. The tariff regime which provided for, in the case most of the items exported from Guyana, a 100% reduction in the applicable rates of duty and in the list of items that Guyana would export to Brazil again...

entire report.]

I am not doing that. We have 30 minutes more. In the list of items that

[Ms. Ally: Do not read the

Brazil would export to us most of them had their tariff reduced by 100%, but some had their tariff reduced by 50% and a few others by 15%.

We were also provided with some data on the export over a number of years, which I am not going to read, but which was very revealing. I think this House should know that during the years the data shows that Guyana has not been benefiting a lot from this agreement. We have not been exporting most of the goods. It is 127 items that we are allowed to export to Brazil free of any duties and we have not been taking advantage of that opportunity. In fact, if we look at the figures for 2015 there was a spike in our exports to Brazil in that year for Guy\$1.8 billion worth of export. This was made up from 99% of rice exports from the Rupununi. **[Mr. Ali:**

What was the source of the data?]

The source of the data was the Hon. Minister's presentation. The Committee made a number of recommendations also, which I would not read, because it is in the report.

The third and final engagement was a joint presentation by the Hon. Minister Mr. Greenidge and the Hon. Minister Mr. Felix on the issue of the mandate roles and function of their respective Ministries with regard to the issuance of visas, work permits, and citizenship. Again, we learned quite a bit on work permits, visas and the various challenges that the Ministry face in the implementation and execution of their duties. Again, I would not go into the verbatim report.

We also learnt some important distinction between terminologies such as a "settler", a "migrant", a "re-migrant", "naturalised citizen" and "natural born citizen", all of which are contained in this report. I encourage this House to read the report. The committee again made some recommendations which are contained in this report. I believe on behalf of the Committee I would like to thank the Ministers and their team for presenting.

9.36 p.m.

In the light of what I have just said, be it resolved that this honourable House adopts the Fourth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations. *[Applause]*

Ms. Teixeira: I am very happy that the present Chairperson, Minister Gaskin, has given a good overview of the Committee's work. The report was for the period when I was the Chairperson and I am to hand over to the Minister, but I just want to flag a couples of things and as I said

earlier to thank him for his presentation. However, there are some important recommendations and I know that - I have been around this Parliament a while - many people do not read the Committee's report and I want to support Minister Dominic Gaskin, in encouraging people to read the report, particularly, certain Ministries I want to flag.

When we had the meeting on the maritime zone, including the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) continental shelf, we had a closed session and a Minister and his staff made a very good presentation. What came out of that were recommendations that I think are useful to this honourable House, one of which has to do with intersectoral coordination that is required with the execution of the Maritime Zone Act because there are several parts of it that were laid to different Ministries. For example, under water salvaging, heritage, under the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Convention on the underwater heritage, this is the Ministry of Culture. Then, there are others under various Ministries and, therefore, one of the recommendations is that the Government tries to find and develop regulations which we were not able to do at the time to ensure that each Minister is aware of the responsibilities. This Maritime Zone Act came out at the arbitral award on the maritime boundaries of Guyana and that is the genesis of this Act. Just wanted to put that to flag it, because some of the Ministers are new and they have not read the Act.

The second thing had to do with the multi-agency mechanism for addressing issues which may arise as a result of oil and gas exploration which has issues to do with the maritime boundaries.

The third issue had to do with the preservation of the underwater cultural heritage and this is to do with our ocean and the EEZ continental shelf and to recommend a mapping of potential sites which would be developed with the international expertise and UNESCO.

A couple of things that need coordination with the University of Guyana, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, in terms of bringing this Act, with a knowledge and an understanding of it, into the curriculum of the university, the secondary schools, so that there are some appreciation of it.

The Hon. Minister Carl Greenidge was very open to the Committee in coming to meet and responding to the questions and we thank him for that. You might find of interest, as a

Parliament, that the biggest item that we export to Brazil is rice. In fact, it was approximately 80% or more of our exports in 2015 of approximately \$1.8 billion.

In the recommendations, which were made, there are several of them which have to do with the Administrative Commission to meet more regularly, the coordination with the private sector, the Chambers of Commerce, to see in what way we could improve the Partial Scope Agreement and benefit more from it as a country. Secondly, it is relating to the towns in Region 9 and Region 10 which would also be a part of the whole corridor in relation to the Partial Scope Agreement.

The last point on recommendations had to do with negotiating, under the Administrative Commission, with the Brazilian to increase the quota for our rice from what is 10,000 tons to 100,000 tons or more.

We then had meetings with the Minister of Citizenship and Hon. Minister Carl Greenidge to deal with how they were coordinating.

To quickly go to the recommendations, because I want to flag them, because I think they are important. One is the issue to do with the practice which is not required in law and it is always there with us when we were in Government and it is taking place in your office too, your Government, and that is the demand of Guyana Registrar Office to keep the original birth certificates of Guyanese born overseas who are getting Guyanese overseas birth registration. I would not go into details with that. There is no law which requires that, but it means that the person will lose his or her original birth certificate. That is not required and it should not be done.

The second thing is that - I confess as a Minister of Home Affairs that I did not recognise it - there is a terrible part of the Immigration Act and that has to do with a section that really violates our human rights that talks about prohibiting people coming into the country who may be physically challenged, mentally challenged and are of what is called immoral character, or something such as that. We ask for that to be looked at, in terms of a deletion amendment so that we bring ourselves in line with the convention and our own Constitution.

The third area was a controversial one which has to do with a practice of the Ministry of Citizenship returning people who have insufficient funds. This is the last point - so take it easy

Ms. Ally, keep your horses under control, keep your horses down - which has to do with the Act actually stating that people cannot be turned back because of “not in possession of sufficient means”. What immigration had been doing for quite a long time is deciding what insufficient funds are. It is completely different, in terms of what the law means and the implementation. We ask that the Ministry dealing with immigration to create protocols and guidelines to ensure that immigration officers are keeping to the law which states that the person is not in possession of sufficient means, instead of them turning back people with what is called “insufficient funds”, and also not recognising people with credit cards who may not have a lot of cash on them. That was the last, of course. That is important for, I think, Minister of Public Security, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Citizenship to look at.

We also have a work plan and now that we have a new chairman we would be continuing with the work plan and adding to it that we had started and developed for the period of this Committee. We ask that the report be adopted. We ask that you read it, we hope, as a Committee, because this was a joint effort. It was not an acrimonious one and that is why we believe in the Committee system. We believe in the Special Select Committees and the sectoral Committees that we could make decisions there that are helpful and help our country. Therefore, both the Hon. Minister Gaskin and I put the report as an example of when we work together that we would achieve a lot.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Report adopted.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I believe that this is a good time to end our labours for today, but before we do that I beg your leave to make an announcement. The Speaker accepted, on behalf of Members of the Parliament, an invitation to receive a Sensitisation Workshop on Competition Law. The Caricom Competition Commission approached the Speaker with an invitation in the light of the fact that part of the programme, which it is required, to follow is to sensitise, certainly our willingness to be sensitised, all Parliaments in the region in relation to competition law. We have been invited to receive the chairman of the commission who would be the person to deliver the workshop for half a day on Wednesday 27th February, 2017 at 10 o'clock in the morning. This information would have been given to the Parliamentary Management Committee

(PMC) yesterday, if we had been able to meet. The actual date, 27th February, 2017, we have received confirmation in writing only this morning, though we were told yesterday about it. Hon. Members are invited to attend the workshop. Information would be provided to all Hon. Members by tomorrow. It is the information which we have and which would be generated to all Hon. Members tomorrow.

Hon. Prime Minister, Moses Nagamootoo, I invite you to move the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, if you would kindly permit me, I would like to observe that the Order Paper for the next sitting has been circulated but we had a consultation that revealed that there are two major clashes in events during this month. The 16th and 17th February, 2017 being the CARICOM Summit, being held in Guyana, and then, of course, the observance of our Republic Anniversary and celebration of Mashramani later in the month, and saying that, I would respectfully ask to move the adjournment of this honourable House to a date in March, the 9th of March, at 2 p.m. which is a Thursday, and I so move.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, this honourable House is adjourned until the 9th of March, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.49 p.m.