



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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NATIONAL COMPETITION POLICY

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.37 p.m.): I rise to second the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition to the amendment moved by the Treasurer. In that case, I will be supporting both of those amendments. I believe that there are two issues that members have to consider, and we have to make sure that we do not get confused. Often in this place members do get confused, and that is unfortunate. The two issues are the impact of the National Competition Policy versus the role of the National Competition Policy. I will firstly address the impact because, to some extent, that has already been addressed by the previous three speakers in this debate.

The impact of National Competition Policy has obviously been detrimental to large sections of the Australian and Queensland countryside and population. It is important that Governments are cognisant of the impact of the decisions they make on the local community. It is important that they actually work with the local community to make sure that, as people have to adjust to things, they actually work through with them. All Governments of all political persuasions have failed that test. But simply because we have failed that test does not disguise the fact that Governments are elected to do those kinds of things.

I firmly believe—and anyone who looks at this in a rational fashion would have to agree—that Governments are elected to make what I would term non-market decisions. In our democracy—in our free market or private enterprise market—the way one makes non-market decisions without having revolutions is through the parliamentary process. It is by electing Governments that people express their social views, and it is in the Parliaments of Australia—whether it be Federal or State—where those views are not only expressed but, if one likes, traded off.

We should also not forget the role of the National Competition Policy, which did not come about simply as someone's bright idea, despite the fact that its proponents were often referred to as economic rationalists. The role of National Competition Policy was to make Australia more competitive. Why do we want to be more competitive? We happen to live in an extremely competitive world. For example, it takes only three out of every 10 farmers to feed and clothe Australia. The other seven have to rely on exporting their products in order to survive. If Australia did not export, seven out of 10 farmers would be on the dole. In that sense, we would be worse off as a community. At its roots, National Competition Policy was designed to ensure that Australia remained competitive. There are members here who know more about the land than I do, but I do not know of any significant product on which we have a monopoly in the world. We have to compete with the rest of the world to sell our products.

Mr Hamill: Roo meat.

Dr WATSON: That is a good one. I wonder how long that will last. I said "significant product."

For the vast majority of products, the fact is that we do not have a monopoly. Even when one considers roo meat, there are other competitive products. We have to compete. To compete we have to be efficient. We have to be able to provide the product at the right price at the right quality and on time. That is what the National Competition Policy was designed to do. The fact that it has gone off the rails does not mean that the policy itself is incorrect. We have to ensure that it is applied not only in a sensitive fashion but also in a correct fashion and one that takes into account the position of the Parliaments.

Time expired.
