



Speech by

**Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

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Hansard 20 October 1998

### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

#### **Food Safety**

**Hon. H. PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries) (10 a.m.), by leave: There is no more fundamental issue for primary producers around the world than the issue of food safety. The food our farmers produce must be safe—their livelihoods, their markets and their consumers depend on safe food and fibre. The public health responsibility of our primary producers is critical.

Queensland primary producers have worked very hard for many years to meet their food safety and public health responsibilities, and our second-to-none image as a "clean and green" producer is evidence of that hard work. For instance, our meat industry is recognised as one of the world leaders in food safety. This has involved the introduction of hazard analysis and critical control point quality control and quality assurance programs as tools for management. I notice some members opposite nodding their heads in agreement. That worries me because the former Borbidge Government left the Queensland Livestock and Meat Authority, the body charged with the responsibility for food safety, with a \$1.845m loss.

A report by independent business consultants found as at 30 June this year that the QLMA had liquid assets amounting to \$1.3m and it would be expected that the authority would exhaust its funds somewhere between December this year and March next year. With a current deficiency of equity of \$200,000, the report concluded that the QLMA is technically trading as insolvent. What a legacy for a body as important as the QLMA.

Among the main points for the QLMA's poor trading results the consultants found, firstly, a failure to get Cabinet approval for new fees in March 1998 and implementing new rebated fees prior to their being approved; and, secondly, a failure to convince the then Government that there is a community service obligation beyond that serviced by industry itself. This is Government inaction at its worst. This is a Borbidge Government back-seat job of epic proportions.

The Queensland Livestock and Meat Authority was formed under the Meat Industry Act 1993 with responsibility for ensuring meat safety regulation in Queensland. Its role is a very critical one. At Government and industry insistence, the QLMA has developed and implemented the industry adoption over a four-year period of Q-Safe, a new quality assurance accreditation program that represents world best practice in food safety management. Instead of assuring the future of this body, the previous Government let the QLMA sink into a \$1.8m loss.

I can inform the House today that Cabinet has approved the course of action I propose, which is to appoint an administrator. The administrator, whom I have yet to appoint, will report to me on what action and funds will be required to provide a sustainable QLMA. The appointment of an administrator does not reflect on the integrity of the board members; they have served the QLMA well. However, the appointment does reflect on the inaction of the previous Government. As well as the appointment of the administrator, I will initiate a review of the Meat Industry Act to start soon. This review is required under the provisions of the legislation. The members opposite can nod in agreement as much as they like, but they must also have a reality check from time to time and shake their heads in disgust at what they did not do.