



Speech by

JEFF KNUTH

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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TARIFF PROTECTION, SUGAR INDUSTRY

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—ONP) (6.05 p.m.): I second the motion moved by the member for Lockyer. I will share with members the comments by some prominent people in the sugar industry. Mr Henry Bonanno—Harry—said that canegrowers have reluctantly accepted the tariff's demise as part of a compromise. That was a compromise arising from a threat by Government Ministers to retain the industry's single desk selling arrangement. Mr Ballantyne of the Canegrowers Association said on the PM program that if either side of Government could have guaranteed the industry that the retention of the tariff would have also guaranteed retention of all its other marketing and structural arrangements, the industry would have probably had a different approach. It was blackmailed into that course of action and was complaining about it. A gun was held to its head. The Government seems to think it is a fair deal. It is not.

The financial loss for this industry is \$27m. Some people have put the figure as high as \$35m. That figure represents not just jobs that will be lost eventually but also the loss of investment and development in this industry. It is damaging to the families and rural communities that support that industry. It is gratuitous damage that is being inflicted by the Government on this industry. As I have said, it is inconsistent with the treatment in the motor vehicle sector. A level playing field was supposed to have been the result of the removal of the tariff. I will give members some examples of sugar tariffs elsewhere. The USA has 100% tariff protection. Thailand has 104% tariff protection. The European Union has 170% tariff protection. Australia has zero tariff protection. That is in no way a level playing field.

I will explain to members why I won the seat of Burdekin. One of the biggest issues in the Burdekin at the time of the election was the loss of tariff protection in the sugar industry. It is a commonly known fact that when Senator Bill O'Chee visited the Burdekin he talked to a lot of the concerned canefarmers. His only comment to the canefarmers was, "If you are such good canefarmers, why do you not remove your businesses over to Burma?" That infuriated the canefarmers. I do not think they ever forgave him. Thus, I was elected to the seat of the Burdekin.

I will not place the blame for this measure on the current members of the Opposition. It is not their fault. I think the problem goes much deeper in the Federal coalition. The only prominent figure to cross the floor on this issue was the member for Kennedy, Bob Katter. I commend him for that move. That man had a lot of courage, a lot of guts. He is still holding his seat today, which shows that people support members who have courage. De-Anne Kelly voiced her concern. That is another story. For various reasons, she did not cross the floor. I ask the members of the National/Liberal Parties who are sitting on the Opposition benches to pressure their Federal counterparts to consider seriously the damage that has been done to the sugar industry as a result of that decision and to do the right thing by my constituents and help this industry out. I support the motion.
