



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 19 November 1998

### **DAIRY INDUSTRY AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (2.30 p.m.): I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate. I congratulate some of the speakers who have already spoken. Some of them have made particularly valuable contributions to this subject. I will not go over a lot of the ground that they have covered. I agree with what they said. To repeat it would not serve any purpose. The dairy industry is a very important contributor to the economic base of many of the small communities in the Callide electorate. It is an industry that has a long history of providing a living for many families on the small land areas created by the closer settlement schemes of the 1930s. Today in the Callide electorate, there are many successful dairy farms, especially around Monto. Many of those farms have provided a living for three generations of the same family. There are also some rather large operations that provide employment to numbers of people from the local community. In addition, the milk processing plant at Monto produces butter and casein. Along with the shire council and the timber mill, it is the major employer in the district.

The dairy industry has a great record of adapting to change. The initiative and hard work of its farmers in this area is almost legendary. It is an industry that has expanded its product range and marketed its products well. It is not long ago that dairy products meant white milk, some traditional cheeses and butter. Now there is an incredible range of dairy products available. The demand for the industry's products looks set to continue to grow. This is an industry that has a great future. It has a great history. It is critically important to the survival of many rural communities, many family operators and many of the employees who depend on it for their living.

Therefore, it is right and fitting that Governments at all levels should do whatever is legislatively possible to ensure as much stability as possible in the dairy industry now and in the future. It is right and fitting for Governments to work with industry representatives to determine what can be realistically done to achieve that stability. The type of immediate and total deregulation that was proposed for the dairy industry would have caused enormous upheaval and disruption to producers, processors and whole communities. Of even greater concern is the indisputable fact that has been referred to by a number of speakers here today, that is, that this type of deregulation in other States has not produced any benefits to the consumer in the form of cheaper products; in fact, the opposite is the case. While farmers are forced into a position where they must take less for their product, the consumers pay more and the only winners are the major retailers.

I am therefore pleased and gratified to be able to lend my support to this bipartisan effort to do whatever we can at a State level to ensure that that outcome is not repeated in Queensland. The legislation before the House continues to allow a regulated price and supply management arrangements for the next five years. I note that, in his second-reading speech, the Minister acknowledges that some segments of the industry wanted those arrangements to be adopted on an indefinite basis. I place on the record today my support for that proposition. Although I recognise and appreciate the difficulties in adopting and maintaining the provisions of this legislation for an indefinite period rather than the five-year term, I believe that it should be the aim of Governments to provide that sort of legislative framework on an ongoing basis to allow the dairy industry to continue to operate in a stable way. We should be aiming to provide that type of legislative framework to any industry that finds itself in the same position as the dairy industry does today. We should be aiming to provide that type of legislative framework ahead of the rapidly changing market situations and commercial pressures that

many small family farms and their dependent communities are not likely, by their very nature, to be able to withstand.

Although I would never argue for a legislated system that protects producers from market signals or a legislated system that discourages change, I believe passionately that Governments have a role in these circumstances. Governments have a responsibility to stand with and assist industries that find themselves in the type of position that the dairy industry is in currently. Governments have a responsibility to stand with and assist all the individual operators and all the individual employees who are dependent on those industries and who find themselves threatened by deregulation in our so-called globalised economy. In that respect, I think this legislation is a very important turning point. It is very significant that this legislation—even though some may argue that it does not go far enough—has unanimous support in this Parliament.

There is unanimous support for this legislation as an attempt to moderate the unfair and unjust outcomes of complete deregulation. That sends a very clear message that it is no longer acceptable for any Government now or in the future to say simply that the market can sort it out and thereby abandon family-based businesses, rural or urban, to the tender mercies of the huge multinational conglomerates. It is not acceptable for Governments to tell family operations to survive if they can in the face of increasing globalisation. Governments should be saying—as I believe we are in this Parliament today to the dairy industry—that we recognise our role to help industries and individuals as best we can within the realities of the legislation. We as individual legislators must stand up for the people who as individuals elect us to this role. We must consult with their industry organisations and do whatever is possible to ensure that their businesses and industries are not wiped out or manipulated by forces that are infinitely more powerful than they could ever hope to be.

I believe that in this legislation we have achieved an acceptance that not all outcomes of deregulation and open competition are beneficial and wonderful. That is a big step in the right direction. We have achieved an acceptance that Governments need to act in the interests of the individuals who elect us and correct to some extent some of the inequities of open competition in totally deregulated markets. There is now a welcome recognition that Governments have the responsibility to ensure that deregulation and so-called open competition does not result in huge powerful players so dominating the market that there is no effective competition. That was a very real possibility in this instance. There is now a recognition that Governments have the responsibility to ensure that the undesirable outcomes of open competition and deregulated markets are minimised.

That attitude and that philosophy must be carried through into other legislation. That attitude and that philosophy must be built upon to achieve a general acceptance in public administration. Although the provisions of this legislation have a five-year life span, the philosophy behind this legislation must be supported by all Governments on an ongoing and indefinite basis in the interests of all those individuals who elect every one of us. As individuals they will never be powerful enough to manipulate their particular market in the way that huge multinational conglomerates do, but they deserve every chance we can give them to continue to earn a living for themselves and their families without being wiped out by forces far beyond their capacity to match. As individuals and industries, they deserve the support of whatever Government they elect in whatever way is practical and possible within the realities of their industry situation. I believe that that is what this legislation does for the dairy industry. It does not, cannot and was never meant to solve all the problems and make everything right for everyone; but it does what is possible to ensure that the industry has a fair go and a fair future.

I am pleased to support this legislation today. I will continue to support and promote the philosophy behind it for as long as I am elected to this role, because I believe that that is the responsibility of elected representatives and I believe that this type of legislation is the responsibility of Governments.

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