



Speech by

**Mr LEN STEPHAN**

**MEMBER FOR GYMPIE**

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Hansard 19 November 1998

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr STEPHAN** (Gympie—NPA) (5.06 p.m.): In joining this debate, I wish to refer to the clauses of the Bill that relate to fruit and vegetable markets. I warn that, although direct selling is becoming very important for a lot of areas of the industry, there is nothing to be gained when the producers become price takers rather than price setters. I hope that the amendments in this legislation do not affect in any way the amount of money that the producers would be receiving for their product. They are at the end of the line now in terms of getting a return on their product and I would like to think that producers continue to set the prices for their products.

The industry is very well organised and there is no doubt that that has been of benefit to the producers. However, in the past week or two the issue of commercial sellers being properly licensed has been raised in terms of those sellers being able to meet certain requirements to ensure that they get a sufficient return for the produce and do not go out the back door. Commercial sellers are required to be properly licensed, to provide the appropriate fidelity bond, to maintain prescribed accounting records and be audited annually so that they can sustain their businesses.

We must make sure that that occurs because we need commercial sellers to access overseas markets, which we are doing much more than we were, say, three or four years ago. There is a big demand for our fruit and vegetables in China, Japan and Malaysia, so it is also important that our producers have the ability to produce a very fine article for their clients overseas. I certainly want to make sure that the Minister notes that. At times, it is very difficult for producers to satisfactorily harvest a crop, even though they have been going through the process for a long time and they know what they are doing.

For example, in the past week or so, flying foxes have been causing havoc with the stone fruit crops on the Sunshine Coast. The whole area was producing well until the flying foxes came in and, almost overnight, wiped out the crop. I do not know what can be done about that. I am merely highlighting the problems that producers face from time to time. They really need to be protected whenever possible.

I thank the House for the opportunity to make this contribution. During the debate on the clauses of the Bill, I will ask the Minister about what is happening in relation to the markets.

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