



Speech by

Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 19 November 1998

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (4.56 p.m.): I will comment on three elements of the Bill. The first element is the corporatisation of the Brisbane Markets. A couple of years ago, there was some discussion about privatisation of the markets. I would like to commend the Minister for the fact that that has not proceeded. For horticulturists in my area the spectre of privatisation was quite concerning because of the risk of increased costs to market their products. I commend the Minister for his undertaking to retain the Rocklea markets in public ownership. That is a huge step forward for our product growers.

The second element is the continuation for 12 months of the exemption under the Forestry Act. I have a small but very important timber industry in the top part of my electorate. That industry relies on allocations from the Government for part of its product. That 12 months will allow time for the RFA for our area to be finalised and for some staged and managed change if those allocations have to change. There is a small community in that area and it relies heavily on its timber industry. That community will die if that industry is removed. I value that extension on their behalf.

The last element—and one that is probably more confusing than anything else because of the diversity of opinion involved—is the issue of branding. I took some advice from a number of industry groups that I thought were reflective of the industry. I have since been advised by a number of people that they are not. I did not ring the Cattlemen's Union, but I spoke to representatives of the UGA and BIDAC. They said that the prohibition of rib branding was a step in the right direction. I thank the Minister for his briefing. Advisers from the department gave me a briefing on the dairy and primary industries Bills. I asked the Minister's adviser what return there would be for cattlemen for changing what has been an historical process. I am excluding cheek branding. That is barbaric. It should never have occurred. The advice that I was given was that over time there would be a rate of return to producers if they changed their herd-management practices. I asked them the time period involved and I was told 10 years.

If I were a producer and I was being required under legislation to change a practice today—the legislation may be declared in March next year—and I had to wait 10 years before I received a rate of return on that changed practice, I would not be terribly impressed at all. It may take 10 years for breeders to be turned out, but a normal beast is turned off the farm within three years. Therefore, in reasonable weather, cattlemen should be seeing a reasonable rate of return for those hides within three years. They are paid nothing now. I acknowledge that. The hide sellers must give a clear undertaking that they will give a rate of return to the producers. There is nothing in the Bill and nothing in the amendments that have been circulated to give that assurance to producers.

Some comment has been made about the \$20m that has been allocated to the Queensland meat processing development initiative. I know that there has been a suggestion that part of that money could be allocated to develop a process whereby the people who benefit in the end, that is the hide sellers, are obligated to give a return to the hide producers. Unless there is an obligation established, human nature being what it is, the sellers of the hides will say to the Government, "Thank you very much. You have obligated those wasters not to brand in the middle of the hide so we are going to get a better product to sell. But tough luck, we have not had to pay them in the past and we are not going to pay them in the future." Unless there is an obligation on the processors of the hides to

pay the producers, it is not going to happen and a lot of Queensland producers are going to be as angry as hornets.

I wonder whether the Minister has any plans to ensure that a rate of return is established for producers from the processors, perhaps through a system that is developed through the QMPDI. I seek the Minister's comment on that. I am at a bit of a loss on this issue because, as I said, I had accepted that those producer groups represented the producers in Queensland. Yet I have heard various points of view from members of this Chamber that they do not; the UGA and the CU represent perhaps only 20% of growers. If that is the case, then it is not a fair sampling or a fair representation of the growers in this State.

Again, a lot of that pain would be reduced if the producers knew categorically that there will be a return on their changed methodologies, that the processors will be obligated to pay them for their hides. I seek the Minister's comment on that.
