



Speech by

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Hansard 15 April 1999

COMPETITION POLICY REFORM (QUEENSLAND) REPEAL BILL

The Commonwealth Policy Reform Act 1995 says that the object of competition policy is to "enhance the welfare of Australians through the promotion of competition and fair trading and provision for consumer protection". Over the ensuing years the reality has proved to be completely different. National Competition Policy, a product of economic rationalism, has now been clearly exposed for what it is: a damaging, dangerous regime which is actually reducing competition and entrenching monopolistic behaviour. It is demonstrably costing the people of Queensland more and more.

The facts are undeniable. What happened when the banking industry was deregulated? Customer service levels dropped, bank fees increased, staff were sacked and many country towns lost their banks altogether. What happened when the sugar tariff went? Millions of dollars flew out of the hands of Australian canefarmers and into the coffers of the nearly 100% foreign-owned beverage and confectionary industry. Instead of the money going into our country communities, it went straight to multinational companies such as Cadbury and Nestle. Has the price of a Mars bar gone down as a result? No.

What about the Queensland power industry? The coalition broke up the State's power industry into a number of smaller competing entities because Fred Hilmer said it was a good idea. Did electricity prices drop for ordinary Queenslanders? No, they have not, but blackouts, brownouts, load shedding and other problems have multiplied. Now the Labor Party is going to reamalgamate the power industry so that it is big enough to compete on the open market. What a farce.

And what happened when the Queensland bread industry was deregulated by the Labor Party? In 1990, A 680 gram loaf of bread cost just \$1.20 in Brisbane—by far the cheapest loaf in Australia. Immediately upon deregulation, bread prices began to rise and have continued to rise well above the consumer price index over time.

The latest fiasco is the deregulation of the milk industry in Queensland. We now have the sorry situation of an entrenched duopoly, consisting of the foreign-owned Pauls and the Dairy Farmers Group, who immediately helped themselves to a milk price rise of a minimum of 6c per litre. Have the consumers benefited from deregulation? No. Did the farmers benefit? No. Then why on earth do we allow this to continue?

National Competition Policy allows multinational companies to shift their financial and human resources around the world at will to maximise their profits and minimise their taxation, regardless of the unemployment that results and regardless of whether or not consumers benefit. It is only the legislative power of Parliaments that can protect the people from the economic tyranny of globalisation. All the Premier has to do is pick up a pen and write to the other States and say that Queensland is out of National Competition Policy. It is as simple as that.

We need our farms and businesses and services more than we need the bribes from Canberra. It is true that we will lose a bit of Commonwealth money. But the State will also save money it would otherwise have spent on supporting the casualties which are inevitable following deregulation, and the State will remain in control of Government owned enterprises and local government activities and will keep other areas out of the clutches of Canberra.

This Bill represents an important first step in the Parliament of Queensland asserting its prerogative to make laws for the good economic governance of the people of Queensland. If the Bill is passed, then Parliament can start with a clean slate to develop policies designed by the Queensland Parliament for the benefit of Queensland for Queenslanders, and not to satisfy the textbook fairy story which does not work in the real world.

If the Queensland Parliament decides to deregulate a particular sector of the economy, all well and good. But if this Parliament chooses not to deregulate, then Canberra should not be able to bludgeon Queensland into submission. We need to send a strong and unequivocal message to Canberra that this Parliament will not allow the people of Queensland to be ridden over roughshod. The people of Queensland are paying more for milk because this Government will not stand up to Fred Hilmer and his bean counter mates in Canberra who would not know one end of a cow from the other.

It is a crying shame that the Competition Policy Reform (Queensland) Bill was passed unanimously—and I repeat "unanimously"—by all members of the Labor, Liberal and National Parties without so much as a single amendment in 1996. Just a few of the many members of this Parliament who have seen the error of their ways and are now jostling and posturing to oppose National Competition Policy include the Premier, the Treasurer, the Leader of the Opposition and the members for Mulgrave, Warwick, Logan, Chermside, Crows Nest, Inala, Kurwongbah and Warrego. To those who now regret passing the original competition Bill, here is their chance to repair the damage they have caused. I am sure that they will be most grateful to One Nation for providing them with the opportunity to do so. When this legislation comes up for debate, I do not want to see a bunch of fawning, bootlicking, GST-loving economic rationalists caving in to the GST-loving economic rationalist Liberals in Canberra. I want to see all members of this House support this Bill. Queensland has stood alone before. Let us stand alone again.

I challenge all members of this House, especially the members of the National Party, who are now contemplating their navels: stand up for the needs of Queensland, put loyalty to Queensland above loyalty to their Liberal masters in Canberra and support this bold initiative. I commend the Bill to the House.
