



Speech by

Mr DOUG SLACK

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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TRANS-TASMAN MUTUAL RECOGNITION (QUEENSLAND) BILL

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (3 p.m.): It had not been my intention to speak to the Bill, because I expected the House to be universal in its support for it. However, I was prompted to speak after listening to the contribution of the member for Lockyer who, for some reason or other, sees great dangers in the Bill before the House and feels that we may be swamped with imports from New Zealand. Over many years, we have had a strong two-way trading relationship with New Zealand that has presented many opportunities for us. That will continue to be the case. This legislation can only further those opportunities. I cannot understand anybody in this House having such a regressive and negative attitude towards the potential strengthening of ties with a country that can give Queensland increased opportunities for jobs and prosperity.

We are a trading nation and over 80% of what we produce is traded. We must enhance all opportunities to further our ability to export what we produce. For example, my own area of Bundaberg has many horticultural producers who export to New Zealand. I cannot for one moment understand how anybody can feel that we cannot compete if we are going to operate in the marketplace with New Zealand. I pay every tribute to New Zealand exporters. They have done very well. They can show us a thing or two; we can learn from them. They perform very well in the international marketplace and they are very good at packaging. In certain areas, I have looked at them with some respect. However, at the end of the day any cooperation that we can engender between New Zealand and ourselves can only be to the benefit of both. We are talking about a mutual understanding—a Bill of cooperation—to ensure that we maximise our opportunities in the marketplace, not just for Australians and New Zealanders but also for the rest of the world. This is particularly so for Asia.

While Asia has its problems, it is still a major outlet for Australian and New Zealand products. Together, we can penetrate that market. We can learn from each other and benefit from the fact that we have had a long association. We are ANZACS; broadly speaking we have a similar history, we have similar laws and a similar outlook on life. We want to see each other prosper. I think that anybody who stands in this House and says that we should take a regressive step in our relationship with New Zealand is not living in the 21st century. Unfortunately, such a person must be living in the 17th or 18th centuries. That has certainly not been my view from my experience in the trading area.

I do not want to knock One Nation, because obviously that party has some supporters who feel that jobs would be under threat through increased imports from wherever it may be. However, I return to the point that 80% of what we produce is exported. There are many opportunities to export to New Zealand as there would be opportunities for New Zealanders to export to Australia. Surely Queenslanders can compete in the marketplace, which is what we are being asked to do. We should have every confidence that we can do that.

If we do not have the confidence to compete in the New Zealand marketplace, how can we have the confidence to compete in the marketplace in Japan or the US, where we are doing very well, thank you very much. For the information of the Premier and the House, I state that we took the initiative to diversify our trade into markets other than Asia. That move meant no disrespect to Asia, but the reality was that we saw that it was unwise to have, as some people say, all our eggs in one basket. We also realised that we are competitive in the US and European markets. Australians and Queenslanders can take pride in the fact that our products are as good as any products from anywhere

else in the world, and I defy anybody to say differently. For example, the backdrops that are produced in Queensland for the movie industry are equal to or better in quality than those produced in California and they are cheaper. One will find the same thing in the European market. What we produce is as good as anything that the Europeans produce and it is cheaper. Of course, the problem is the Asian market, where our goods may be a little more expensive but our quality is better, so it is a matter of weighing quality against quantity.

At the end of the day, the Queensland coalition Government took the decision to diversify into markets such as Europe and the US and, as the Deputy Premier mentioned this morning, the UAE and other Arab countries. Last year I led a delegation to the UAE, which resulted in very positive signs for increased trade with the UAE. I also led a delegation to the US, which also had very positive results. I do not have the figures in front of me, but trade to those countries has expanded quite substantially. Africa and India are also potential outlets for Queensland trade. There are plenty of trade opportunities, but we have to be very positive about approaching those opportunities. If we adopt a negative attitude, we will find ourselves going backwards. People will find themselves out of work and the farming communities that export their produce will lose their international markets if we approach this issue in a haphazard or a timid way.

While I am on my feet I shall speak a little about tariffs, because there is some fear that Australia, being a low tariff country, is at the mercy of other countries. The fear is that those countries will look after themselves and will increase their tariff barriers or will enforce tariffs that we cannot compete with. The reality is that tariffs throughout the world are coming down. It is easy to say that Japan, China and elsewhere have not reduced their tariffs significantly and that they still have tariffs of 50% or 100%. However, in many cases over the last few years tariffs have been halved. In the future, we need to position ourselves to take advantage of the lowering of tariffs throughout the world. Currently, we are not taking advantage of them to the extent that we should be.

I know that the problems that, for example, Korea is facing are putting it under pressure. It is the same with Japan, China and other Asian countries. However, as yet I have not seen any signs that they are not progressing with their program of lowering tariffs. Early in the next century we will see quite a significant lowering of tariffs, to the extent that countries such as Korea will have virtually no tariffs. As a country that exports 80% of our goods, that can only be to our advantage. We need to encourage trade cooperation between countries. As I have said, we have already diversified into Europe, the Arab countries, Africa and the US. We must diversify wherever we can. We need to foster close cooperation between all of the countries with which we have built up a strong trading relationship. In other words, we should not forget Asia. We should maintain those markets in their time of need. Having said that, now is not the time to be regressive or to even think about not endeavouring, as best we can, to have closer cooperation with New Zealand.
