



Speech by

GRANT MUSGROVE

MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD

Hansard 26 November 1999

PRIMARY INDUSTRY BODIES REFORM BILL

Mr MUSGROVE (Springwood—ALP) (12.21 p.m.): I rise to support the Primary Industries Bodies Reform Bill. The Government has consistently said that it is a Government for all Queenslanders. It is a Government determined to work for all Queenslanders, no matter how they vote or where they live. Of course, that determination means responding to the concerns raised by Opposition members on behalf of their local constituents without fear or favour. This Bill is in part a response to representations made by the Opposition.

In April this year, the National Party member for Hinchinbrook made representations to the Minister for Primary Industries on behalf of Mrs Pat Edgerton of Innisfail. The member for Hinchinbrook wrote to the Minister. The letter states—

"I am enclosing a letter which she"—

that is, Mrs Edgerton—

"has sent me and I regard its contents as being extremely concerning because it reflects a position within the Innisfail cane growing community."

Later the member states—

"I know Mrs Edgerton as being an extremely rational person and I don't believe she is exaggerating the difficulties of growers that are getting close to the end of their tether."

In her letter to the member for Hinchinbrook Mrs Edgerton states—

"While the Canegrowers executive tell us to budget for negative income they continue to draw their own fat salaries."

Later she states—

"A lot of people feel this way."

In starting her letter Mrs Edgerton refers to a petition being circulated calling for the Canegrowers organisation to be sacked. She refers to local concerns about compulsory levies and, indeed, question marks about its very validity. I believe that the member for Hinchinbrook deserves some acknowledgment for his representations to the Minister on this matter. I am sure that the member for Hinchinbrook can take heart that this Bill is now before the House.

From comments by the honourable member and his constituent, it appears that the issue of compulsory levies is a matter of great concern, particularly in the Wet Tropics. I believe that the member for Hinchinbrook has taken a pragmatic view in making representations to the Minister on this issue. I can only assume from the honourable member's own comments that he, when he was Minister for Primary Industries, was planning to take similar action to deal with this issue.

I have it on good authority that immediately prior to the last State election the National Party's primary industries policy committee had a meeting in the office of the then temporary Minister, Marc Rowell. I do not know if the member for Hinchinbrook was at that meeting. He may have been still finding his way around the building or unpacking. Nevertheless, I understand that at that meeting the members had resolved that the five bodies should be subject to a poll of producers and if that poll

failed the bodies would be made voluntary—cold turkey, cut off at the knees, no time to adjust, no time to make their way in the new deregulated environment. They would be alone to face the winds of the market, for better or for worse.

I understand that one of the current advisers of the member for Crows Nest was one of those supporting this position. At that time, of course, this same person was adviser to the member for Hinchinbrook. It does seem somewhat unlikely that he would be advocating this position without the knowledge of his Minister. However, I am also led to believe that the leader of one of the five bodies happened into that very meeting. He was not invited but had been tipped off about what was happening and he entered the meeting nonetheless. He very articulately put the case for keeping these bodies, arguing—these are apparently his actual words—that "these bodies have served the National Party well". Apparently the committee resolved not to change the National Party platform this time. So the National Party when it was in Government was actively considering cutting these bodies down. What a sharp contrast that is with this Labor Government, which is helping them to change into a better, more secure framework.

I know that as Minister the member for Hinchinbrook did not achieve anything, I know that he was unceremoniously dumped after the last State election, I know that he was overlooked when the coalition came to power in 1996 in favour of Trevor Perrett and I know that when the coalition lost power last year he was overlooked again in favour of the member for Crows Nest. Now, with the imminent departure from the Opposition frontbench of the member for Crows Nest, the member for Hinchinbrook may get recalled to primary industries, but it would really be a recall by default. The Opposition cupboard is well and truly bare.

In Opposition the member for Hinchinbrook has ensured that the matter of compulsory levies has remained firmly on the agenda of this Government. I hope that his actions will ensure that there is bipartisan support for this Bill. The Minister for Primary Industries has said that bipartisan support for this Bill is expected by not only Government but also industry. Producers would be disappointed and dismayed if there was not bipartisan support for this Bill. After all, this Bill enfranchises rank and file producers in the sugar, fruit and vegetable, dairy, pork and commercial fishing industries to a much greater extent than is the case under the present outmoded and convoluted arrangements. I commend the Bill to the House.
