



Speech by

JEFF KNUTH

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—IND) (10.22 a.m.): Colleagues, I am compelled to rise to comment on Australia's utterly comical stance at the meeting of the World Trade Organisation and the blind adherence of successive State and Federal Governments to the National Competition Policy. I will try to slightly pry open the eyes of those bureaucrats and those politicians who cannot see that we are the laughing stock of our fellow trading countries—standing all alone on the level playing field with nobody to kick the ball to us.

Sugar farmers in my electorate know all too well how the Federal Labor, Liberal and National Parties have enforced National Competition Policy which has robbed them of their tariff on imported sugar and forced export parity pricing on the domestic market. When the import tariff was removed from the sugar industry, and not the textile and car manufacturing industries, the politicians of the day kept telling us to be patient and wait for the WTO talks to square-up the global situation.

As we witnessed at the weekend, those talks have failed dismally. It is up to this State Government and the Federal Government to stop making a mockery of our farmers on the international stage. The WTO fiasco has highlighted the arrogance of our major political parties who believe that America, Europe and Asia will join Australia on the stage of free trade.

This year, when Queensland cane farmers watched the sugar price plummet to a 13-year low, Canegrowers general manager, Ian Ballantyne, said that our best hopes were through the WTO talks. In February, Mr Ballantyne said—

"A freeing-up of world trade in sugar will benefit us by bringing the world market price up by 25 per cent closer to the cost of production of efficient producers."

It has not happened, and the fiasco which unfolded in Seattle casts a dark cloud over the Queensland sugar industry—helped in no way by the flawed Sugar Industry Bill which passed through this House not so long ago. I am wondering if this Government has any more nails left to drive into the coffins of those farmers who are turning their backs on the land thanks to the National Competition Policy.

Time expired.
