



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard 29 April 1999

MEAT INDUSTRY AMENDMENT STANDARD (No. 1) 1999

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (8.50 p.m.): I am pleased to rise to support this disallowance motion moved by the member for Crows Nest. I have no doubt that it has the support of the whole of rural and regional Queensland. Every rural community is tonight supporting this disallowance motion moved by the member for Crows Nest. As I said in my first speech in this House nearly 12 months ago, my electorate, more than many others in this State, is made up of relatively small communities, and those communities are made up of many small family-owned businesses.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. For such a small number of members, they are very vocal. I ask them to give the member for Callide a fair go.

Mr SEENEY: As I was saying, most of my electorate is made up of relatively small communities, and most of those small communities are made up of many family-owned small businesses. Most of those businesses will never make their owners rich. In fact, many of their owners accept the fact that they probably own no more than the people whom they employ. They continue to struggle to keep their businesses going to provide jobs for themselves and their employees, who in many cases are members of their own families. They give the lie to the Labor myth that businesses have unlimited money, unlimited money to pay fees such as those that are being imposed upon country butchers. These people continue on with their businesses against the odds because they are part of the communities in which they operate. They know that they are providing a service and making a contribution to the community generally, and they can feel justifiably proud of that.

This regulation, which we on this side of the House are suggesting be disallowed, will attack and threaten the vulnerable position of those small businesses that are involved in the fresh meat trade. Just about every town has a local butcher and an associated slaughter yard. Almost without exception, they are small family-owned operations that employ a couple of people. This regulation puts those jobs at risk. With a couple of jobs at risk in each community, combined with the changes that are being mooted to the meat inspection requirements that these businesses must meet, the threat is very real.

These businesses and the jobs that they provide are important to the survival of every rural community. It cannot be repeated often enough in this Parliament that every job in a rural community is very important to that community's very survival. Every job loss has a flow-on effect that threatens the rest of the community. It means fewer kids at the school and the loss of a teacher. The whole thing snowballs. Every job is very important in a rural community. This regulation will further weaken the viability of every country butcher and every slaughtering business and, by extension, the communities in which they operate will be poorer for it. This regulation will do so on a totally false premise of protecting people's health.

I want to state clearly how pathetic it is to see the Minister for Primary Industries, who is ultimately responsible for this proposition—and the Premier, too—trying to justify this burden on small businesses by emotive statements about meat safety and people's health. This has nothing to do with meat safety; it will do nothing for meat safety, and it will do nothing to decrease any threat to people's health.

The Minister said in his press release of 7 April—

"Queenslanders have a right to guaranteed food safety."

He is dead right. We would all agree with that. Every Queenslander has a right to food safety. Of course everybody agrees with that. The country butchers across Queensland have provided high standards of food safety for many years. They are doing that now. They, as a group, have set a commendable example to other sectors of the food industry in continually improving and upgrading their premises and their procedures. They, as an industry, have embraced quality assurance, most often at considerable cost to their individual businesses. One business that I know of in a small town in my electorate has spent \$60,000 on QA in the last three years to get their premises up to a standard that is second to none and that sets an example to other food industries.

The Minister's pathetic attempt to justify this regulation somehow implies that country butchers are currently threatening the right that consumers have to safe food. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Minister's implication belittles and ignores the industry's record. The Minister goes on—

"The Beattie Government is determined to ensure the meat safety program works."

The unavoidable inference, once again, from the Minister's statement is that the current meat safety program does not work effectively. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. The current meat safety program works extremely well, and it is years ahead of those in other food industries.

This Government's move to apply a massive increase in fees and charges can only contribute to a lessening of the ability of small-business operators to maintain the current standards. Massively increasing fees by up to 300% in some cases will do nothing to improve those already excellent standards, and it is fraudulent for the Minister to make such claims. We have a Minister who knows nothing about the industry. He goes out into rural Queensland and presents a warm and cuddly teddy bear image. It is a Winnie the Pooh approach—no threat to anybody. But the Minister is being duped and, unfortunately, he is being fooled by the people who are advising him.

I suggest that the current Minister for Primary Industries knows nothing at all about the issues. He does not understand, and he cannot understand, the implications and the end result of the decisions that he is taking. He does not understand, he cannot understand or he will not understand the realities of rural Queensland. This will do nothing to enhance the already high standards that country butchers have already achieved. I salute them.

Mr Johnson: The bureaucrats are running the show. It's obvious.

Mr SEENEY: Absolutely! The bureaucrats are running the Minister. As I said, it is Winnie the Pooh. The people behind the Minister have made this decision.

Tonight I want to salute all those small businesspeople out there who have built up their businesses and who have achieved a remarkable and an admirable record in food safety—an admirable record in providing a safe, nutritional product to the communities in which they operate. This regulation will do nothing to improve that, it will simply add another intolerable cost burden to small family-owned businesses. These proposals are an attack on small business. They are an attack on the jobs that they provide and, therefore, they are an attack on the communities themselves.

Once again, it is the same old story. There is not one member opposite who understands how rural communities work. There is not one member opposite who understands the effects of these types of regulations on rural communities. The member for Gregory pointed out earlier in this debate that it is the same tired old approach of the Goss Government. They just do not understand how rural communities work. They do not understand the effects of the decisions that they make on all of those communities out there that are north of Noosa and west of Toowoomba. The great bulk of Queensland is totally left out of the decision-making processes that Labor Governments follow. That is their record. That is the record of the Goss Government. And this is a continuation of the same old tune. This regulation is totally unjustifiable. I urge the House to support the disallowance motion that has been moved by the member for Crows Nest.
