



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

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DEBT; DIESEL FUEL REBATE CONSULTANT

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (7.20 p.m.): I have a couple of matters that I wish to draw to the attention of the House. The first issue is one that we in this place need to take more seriously. I refer to the silent but real increase in the number of Queenslanders who are finding themselves running into serious problems with debt. Not only do we hear about the troubled farm sector with a national farm debt of \$21 billion but we are now hearing about more and more businesses closing and people being forced into bankruptcy because they are unable to service their debts.

I believe that the upward trend in unserviceable debt has not reached the levels to attract public attention because of low interest rates and the perception of a healthy economy. Any upward movement in interest rates would have an immediate and more visible impact than that which is occurring in the current economic climate. In my opinion, the reason for the increase in debt is the rapid growth in casual or part-time jobs. The income of families is slashed by the stroke of a pen. Job uncertainty is causing unknown social problems in the way of family breakdown and lack of confidence. People are not prepared to spend on anything but the basics. Cash flow in the community slows and this affects business and jobs. The cycle continues.

The policies of the Federal Government will drag all workers back to the days of master and servant. Unfortunately, most Australians choose to ignore what is happening to standards of employment until it happens to them personally. That is when they become concerned. Any member who is in touch with the electorate would realise that the gap between rich and poor has widened. The top 20% of earners are paid 10 times more than the bottom 20%. The gap has increased by 4% over the past two years. One in four employees is a casual. The number of full-time jobs is on the decline.

Australia has one of the highest proportions of part-time employment in the developed world. Between 1994 and 1997, one in 15 workers was retrenched. Those numbers are increasing. Only 36% of workers now feel that their jobs are secure. Those at the bottom end of the income scale are now caught up in the social welfare safety net. This group is fast being overtaken by the working poor as minimum wages—the actual take-home pay—are lowered. No wonder bankruptcy is on the increase. No wonder families are walking away from mortgage contracts. We have family breakdowns and marriage breakdowns which are causing a great deal of concern in the community.

The other matter I wish to bring to the attention of the House reminds us of the low-lives who prey on decent citizens in our State. I am aware of a rip-off whereby rural producers have engaged the services of a diesel fuel rebate consultant for the purpose of lodging applications for the diesel fuel rebate with the Australian Customs Service. The diesel fuel rebate system is based on self-assessment of the amount of diesel fuel that a producer has used or intends to use in activities that are eligible for rebate.

Although I intend to protect the identity of my constituents, I will be naming the consultant who has deliberately ripped off an elderly couple who live in isolation on their property in central Queensland. These two down-to-earth central Queenslanders have struggled through drought and have felt the pain of living the life of a rural producer. I say without any disrespect towards these two lovely people that they are victims of a conman who has exploited their trusting nature and lack of understanding of paperwork. As a result, the conman has been able to convince them to sign documentation without an explanation and left no copies of the documentation.

He convinced my constituents to authorise payment of the rebate into a bank account at Tweed Heads. That payment in excess of \$2,000 was made as per an Australian Customs Service diesel fuel rebate scheme payment advice in mid-November. All attempts to contact this conman have failed. He is not in, he is not available, is sick or is away on business.

Mr John Corbett, a diesel fuel rebate consultant, advertised in the Queensland Country Life and attracted the attention of my constituents. They contacted him in good faith. The address on his business card is Suite 33, Chateau Royale, 23 Garrick Street, Coolangatta. He credits himself as a former senior inspector, diesel fuel rebates. He forgot to add that he is a thief and a man who lacks compassion and an understanding of the impact of his actions.

Time expired.
