



Speech by

**JOHN MICKEL**

**MEMBER FOR LOGAN**

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Hansard 29 April 1999

**MEAT INDUSTRY AMENDMENT STANDARD (No. 1) 1999**  
**Disallowance of Statutory Instrument**

**Mr MICKEL** (Logan—ALP) (9.19 p.m.): This should not be a disallowance motion; it should be a censure motion. We should be censuring the member for Hinchinbrook for ignoring the QLMA's pleas for assistance for many years. It absolutely escapes me how the Minister has sat here patiently for the past couple of hours. The economic vandals of the QLMA, the member for Hinchinbrook and other Ministers of the former Borbidge Government sat mute and absurd whilst the economic vandalism that they wreaked on the QLMA raged around them. Under the coalition, the QLMA was riddled with conflicts of interest and any attempt to place the authority on a sound financial footing was blocked.

I cite two letters that were written to the former member for Barambah, one dated 27 June 1997 and the other dated 11 July 1997. I seek leave to table those letters. They show in irrefutable terms that the QLMA outlined to the then Minister the parlous state that the QLMA had been left in. As the letters state, it was seeking to put fee increases on small butcher shops. I will cite those letters for the honourable gentleman, who was an absolute disgrace as a Minister. In an Opposition bereft of any talent, he is the only one capable of making a Lazarus come back. However, there is no shadow of a doubt that he is a Lazarus with a charisma bypass.

The member for Barambah paid the proper and appropriate price for his incompetence.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr D'Arcy): Order! Was the member seeking leave to table those documents?

**Mr MICKEL:** Yes.

Leave granted.

**Mr MICKEL:** I refer now to a departmental briefing note of 21 April 1998 headed "Pending Insolvency of the Queensland Livestock and Meat Authority". At that time, the member for Hinchinbrook was the Minister. Point 4 of that briefing note, which is rather alarming, states—

"The Authority's cash position is likely to allow for operation to 30th June, 1998 but the Authority will be insolvent as of 30th June 1998 unless its equity position is immediately resolved."

Insolvent! That is a complete and utter disgrace. The former Minister sold out the authority and placed at risk the health of all Queensland meat consumers. He placed at threat the hard-won reputation of Queensland primary producers. However, it gets worse.

On the back of the briefing note, which I assume the honourable gentleman would not have read, a note states that the future trade of meat from Queensland, both domestically and internationally, faces some major detriment. In other words, the honourable member was willing to place at risk not only the hard-won reputation of the primary producers but also our international trade. Where does he get off coming in here with this disallowance motion?

In a letter dated 13 May 1998, Mr Richie Goldup wrote to the member for Hinchinbrook, referring to the member's letter of 7 May 1998. He stated—

"With respect all members view your response as being quite unsatisfactory and are most disappointed that the position remains unresolved."

Further, Mr Goldup stated—

"All members of the Authority are most concerned as to our ongoing ability to properly discharge our duties and obligations as members of the Authority."

**Mr Lucas:** What did they do about it?

**Mr MICKEL:** Nothing! It was an indecisive do-nothing Government. For 12 months concerns were raised and the authority pleaded for some action—any action—to be taken. What did the do-nothing incompetent coalition Government do? Absolutely nothing! The same coalition that squandered \$14m on the Connolly/Ryan inquiry allowed the authority to fold up through indecision.

This authority protects the health standards of Queenslanders. It was affected to the stage where it could not discharge its responsibilities to, for example, carry out the inspection of butcher shops to ensure that there is not an outbreak of the E. coli food virus that afflicted South Australia in 1995. At that time, the National Meat Processors Association reported a decline in sales of between 20% and 90%. The honourable gentleman opposite says, "We are worried about small business." With a decline of 20% to 90%, they would not have to worry because there would not be any left. That incident underscores how craven, indifferent and callous members opposite were to allow their indecision to carry on for 12 months. Now they are crying crocodile tears about butcher shops.

The South Australian incident followed an incident in the United States in 1993, when meat exported from Australia claimed the lives of four children. As a result, the United States Government informed Australia that it would increase surveillance of Australian meat to ensure that no E. coli contaminated meat entered the United States. Over the years, other countries have used the stories of Australian contaminated meat as de facto embargoes against the Australian product. Over the years, we have had the roo in the stew, chemical residue problems—

**Mr ROWELL:** I rise to a point of order. The member is misleading the House. The QLMA has nothing to do with exports.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is absolutely no point of order. The member will resume his seat.

**Mr MICKEL:** Again we see a demonstration of the extreme incompetence of the member for Hinchinbrook. His briefing note talks about detriment to international trade. That is what I am talking about: international trade to the United States and Japan; our quality export markets. He could not get his head around that in three months. For goodness' sake, where has he been hiding?

**Mr Mulherin:** In a log.

**Mr MICKEL:** I do not like to use intemperate language in reference to the honourable gentleman. As every businessman knows, once a customer is lost, it is damned hard to win them back. The former Minister put that at risk at a time when Australian meat producers were doing it tough.

In 1998, the QLMA was pleading with the member for Hinchinbrook for help. Indonesia is our biggest market for live cattle, buying 390,000 head a year. However, in 1998 when our markets were under threat, the market shrank to 50,000 head. That put enormous pressure on other sectors. In its most recent March edition, ABARE stated that good prospects for export to Japan and the United States in 1999-2000 are expected to contribute to an increase in Australian cattle prices. At a time when those markets were the victims of contaminated Australian meat, the member for Hinchinbrook—the guilty man—placed that under threat.

Let us not overstate our export improvement in the United States, because producers are doing it tough. ABARE notes that beef demand in the Pacific rim market, the destination for 90% of Australia's beef exports in 1998, is expected to be subdued over the medium term. At least as a result of the actions of this Government and this Minister, we have reduced the risk of that fragile market being undermined because of meat contamination scandals.

Tonight we have heard that the taxpayers should not pay for the increase. It is the old story that the Government should pay for it and not the taxpayer. This is National Party economics. The offending butcher shop that requires more inspections to bring it up to a proper health standard simply should pay more. How else can we establish an incentive for one to get up to standard? Why should the butcher who is obeying the rules have to subsidise the one who is not?

That service has to be paid for and the splendid indifference of the member for Hinchinbrook—the guilty man—meant that the QLMA was reduced to insolvency. It had to sell its buildings and its cars. It is no wonder that the people in the bush have lost faith in the National Party. It is no wonder that the National Party has lost seats. The party that was supposed to protect the interests of the people in the bush ratted on them and ignored them. It is no wonder that at the last election the

National Party received the lowest primary vote since its formation. Of course, their salvation is the Labor Party. We will restore the QLMA to financial viability after the bankruptcy that the National Party has plunged it into.

Time expired.

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