



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

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

Mr SPRINGBORG (Warwick—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (9.29 p.m.): Tonight we have heard the desperate rantings of a Government that is trying to defend the indefensible. We have heard the rantings of a Government that cannot keep its word, that will not stand up for small business and jobs, that is not interested in rural and regional Queensland and that has already lost all credibility.

Honourable members would remember that this Government took office based on the support of the Independent member for Nicklin. Fundamental to that support was a written commitment by the now Premier that taxes and charges would not be increased above the CPI. That promise was broken when it increased the fire levy. It was broken again when the Government increased compulsory third-party insurance premiums and it has now been shattered by the introduction of these massive new fees that the Opposition seeks to overturn tonight.

Tonight I have been waiting to hear just one incredible explanation by Government members as to why these fee increases are justified, but I have not heard one single valid explanation. All I have heard is the usual half-truths, untruths, misinformation and misrepresentation that we have come to expect from the Beattie Labor Government. We have heard the Government's clumsy attempts to denigrate the administration of the Queensland Livestock and Meat Authority under the previous Government and the previous board. The financial position of the QLMA has been misrepresented and manipulated by the Government in an attempt to suit its tax agenda.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! The crossfire in the Chamber is unacceptable. I call members to order.

Mr SPRINGBORG: We have heard the absolute furphy that these huge increases are somehow necessary to maintain meat safety and hygiene standards. Members should be under no illusion, these fees are not about guaranteeing the quality of meat. If that were the case, why is it also not necessary to increase the fees that bakeries, fish and chip shops and fast food outlets pay to the Health Department or their local government authority?

The Queensland meat industry has the finest reputation and the best record in Australia for safety and hygiene standards. Every other State is following our lead. The Minister has conceded that himself. By his own admission, meat safety is not threatened. So why is it necessary to increase these fees? It is because the Beattie Government cannot justify the increases and instead it has resorted to a baseless scare campaign about food safety to try to convince the media that it had to step in to safeguard the public—the oldest trick in the book.

The Premier was caught on the run on ABC radio and could not justify his Government's fee increases. He launched a shameful attack, as did other members in this debate tonight, on the meat industry and alleged that it was responsible for poisoning people. The Premier's comments have reverberated around the meat industry and have been heard by every single butcher and meat processor in this State. In trying to dig himself out of a political fix, his attack has insulted every single butcher and every single meat processor in this State. In one fell swoop, he has single-handedly tarnished the reputation of the meat industry and every Queenslanders who has an investment in it. His

comments and his Government's QLMA fees have undermined their livelihoods. His spineless attack will always be remembered.

The Beattie Government has made much of an apparent \$800,000 contribution to the Queensland Livestock and Meat Authority. It has tried to sell this to the industry and to the public as funding its fair share towards meat safety—its community service obligation. But let us look at that claim. Importantly, \$200,000 of that \$800,000 is for remote area service. The Minister knows that that is important, as do other members on both sides of the Chamber. The fact is that that \$200,000 has never been under threat until now. In two years, that funding will cease, leaving butchers and meat processors in rural and remote areas to shoulder the full cost of funding QLMA officers. The remainder of that \$800,000 has been dedicated to the enforcement of illegal slaughtering.

In spite of its rhetoric, the Beattie Government is not contributing one cent towards helping butchers and meat processors to maintain safety and hygiene standards. That cost is being passed on to every single butcher and processor in the form of the new QLMA fees. But the Government has tried to be very clever. It has claimed that the increase is only 8% based on CPI. Yes, annual accreditation fees have been increased by only 8%. However, the crucial factor which the Government has tried in vain to suppress is that, whereas every audit used to be included in the annual accreditation fee, only one audit will now be included in the accreditation fee. For any additional audits, the QLMA requires butchers and processors to pay \$100 per hour, and that will increase the cost significantly.

The fact remains that, under the Government's own laws, some 70% of Queensland butchers require more than one audit. Some 70% of butchers will pay not just the 8% increase and not just the extra 30% after this Government scrapped their rebate, but a 38% increase on their accreditation plus \$100 per hour for every additional audit this Government requires. In simple terms, a category C butcher employing between three and 10 people requiring only one audit per year who paid \$280 last year will now pay \$431—an increase of not 8% but 65%. A category A butcher employing the same number of people who paid \$280 last year will now pay \$881—an increase of 315%.

When pressured by the Opposition, the Minister claimed that he had made a concession for small family butcher shops. He announced that he had capped the cost of audits at \$100. But again this Minister tries to mislead the Parliament. The average time taken for audits for those small butchers is one hour. So the big concession is no concession at all.

Mr Palaszczuk: No, it's not. You're wrong.

Mr SPRINGBORG: When the Minister sums up later on, he will have the opportunity to set the record straight, if he does not feel that it is right. However, that is right.

This Minister continues to try to mislead. This is the same Minister who claimed in today's Queensland Country Life that he alone had opposed Federal Government-driven change to make exceptional circumstances assistance harder to get—the same Minister who has been exposed by the minutes of the ARMCANZ meeting, the member for Crows Nest and the Federal Minister for Agriculture. He did not oppose the changes at all. He supported the decision. Instead of working to improve Queensland's own woeful assistance schemes under which only 70 out of 129 farmers secured QRAA assistance following the floods which caused \$500m in damage, he plays politics. Instead of pushing his Cabinet to scrap stamp duty on crop insurance and loan refinancing, he engages in scaremongering. This is a Minister who to date has enjoyed significant goodwill from primary producers. But it seems that he is fast putting himself in a position where he cannot be trusted.

This is a Government which cannot be trusted. The Beattie Government claims to be obsessed with jobs. It claims to be a Government for all Queenslanders. These massive increases in QLMA fees are not the actions of a Government which is genuinely concerned about jobs. They are not those of a Government which is genuinely governing in the interests of all Queenslanders. These fees are an attack on small business and jobs. I appeal to honourable members to put their electorates first. This motion is not about playing politics, it is about recognising the meat industry's achievements in relation to safety and hygiene standards. It is about standing up for small businesses, in particular the small and long-term family butchers who operate in all of our electorates. It is about standing up for their jobs.

Tonight it was distressing to hear members demonising the meat industry in this State with all their talk about Garibaldi, safety concerns, bad meat and so on. We have a fine meat industry in this State. Our butchers are leading the nation with respect to QA. However, tonight in the Parliament Government members referred to Garibaldi. Members opposite know that that diminishes the community's confidence in our meat industry in this State.

Time expired.
