



Speech by

Mr LEN STEPHAN

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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PRIMARY INDUSTRY BODIES REFORM BILL

Mr STEPHAN (Gympie—NPA) (3.25 p.m.): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to join this debate. When Pat Purcell was speaking to this Bill, he was getting himself wound up about the conditions of workers at meatworks. However, I want to say a few words for the farmer. We know full well that the quality of what we produce on our farms—and I was once a primary producer—is very highly regarded. The only problem is that farmers make only a small profit on their produce. I can remember very well working hard on the farm, particularly when it was raining and I was trying to harvest beans, cucumbers, watermelons or whatever else it might have been. Unless one is involved in farming operations, one does not really realise the amount of work that is involved. The whole family is put to work on the farm.

Before the producer receives anything in his pocket, a lot of money is paid out on insecticides and fungicides; people involved in the harvesting and packing are paid, and the levies are paid. We tend to forget that the imposition of levies is a very important part of the production chain. Although the levies cut into a producer's profits, each producer pays them and that accumulated amount is spent on programs that benefit all producers. Let us look at some of the levies. There is some consistency between the New South Wales and Queensland levies. Obviously, people have put their heads together on this issue, and so they should. For example, the levy on a carton of avocados is 7c; bananas, 4.5c; a bulk bin of citrus, \$2, and 10c on small cartons.

Mr Mulherin: What are mangoes?

Mr STEPHAN: About 8c. I will let honourable members have a look at this document. I bet the honourable member is not even aware that some of these levies are being paid. The levies are part of the sale chain. You do not just pick produce from a tree, put it into a box and send it away.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! I have heard enough of this. The honourable member will address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr STEPHAN: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I turn now to heavy produce, namely, pumpkins, potatoes and so on—and when I was on the farm, I did find them heavy. These days, not much heavy produce is lifted manually; it is all put on an A-lift, which does all the work—unless, of course, it is raining. As I have pointed out before, it often rains before harvesting and farmers just have to deal with that. We now produce a lot of kiwifruit and seasonal melons. These days, melons come onto the market all year round. The quality of that produce from northern Queensland and the Northern Territory is very high. It is important to look after those primary producers, be they in Queensland, Western Australia or the Northern Territory. They do a fantastic job. Their hard work is of benefit to all of us.

I cite the work of Noel Harvey, who is involved with marketing produce to other countries. We cannot just sit back and do nothing. We have to go onto the sales floors and find out what produce buyers are looking for and how they want it presented. Importantly, the levies that are being collected are going to the relevant organisations, and the community benefits from that.

An effective advertising slogan is necessary for successful fruit and vegetable marketing. The latest advertising focuses on the just-in-time mentality. Fruit and vegetables should be supplied not two

or three days before consumers need them, but just in time so that they do not deteriorate. We have to put procedures in place to meet that demand. Some primary producers—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member is drawing tenuous links to the Bill. He will return to the subject matter of the Bill.

Mr STEPHAN: I am referring to the sales chain. Farmers who grow cucumbers or tomatoes obviously want to sell their produce. I do not know how you can get away from that—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I do. The member is drawing a very tenuous link to the Bill before the House. Wide-ranging debate is permissible. However, the member has spoken on three different subjects and referred only once to the corporations.

Mr STEPHAN: Let us look at Alert Digest No. 14. The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee made a number of recommendations to the Minister. The committee expressed doubts about the legal validity of the levies and stated that, if the levies were found to be invalid, the producer bodies would be required to pay back substantial amounts of money. That is a very important aspect of the production chain. In recommendation No. 8, the committee stated that it is desirable for this issue to be resolved as expeditiously as possible. I guess we can go along with that. Mr Deputy Speaker, I take your point that a couple of times in this contribution I strayed from the Bill. I know that a lot of emphasis is placed on what is required in the production line and particularly on that link in the chain. We can never forget the importance of the role of primary producers.
