



Speech by

LINDA LAVARCH

STATE MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

Hansard 29 April 1999

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

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (9 p.m.): I rise to speak against the disallowance motion. What we have heard so far in this debate from members opposite is the same old rhetoric that we get from members of the National Party. Members know the rhetoric: with hands on their hearts the National Party members say that they are looking after the battlers in the bush, that they are standing up for small business and how only they know about primary industries. What a lot of rot! The National Party members have conveniently failed to tell this House and the people of Queensland the facts about the QLMA.

One of those facts is that this Government inherited a disgraceful meat industry legacy from the coalition's administration. It was a legacy which, had it not been addressed, would have destroyed the future meat trade both domestically and internationally. How would those opposite explain that to their constituents in the bush? It is a legacy which, had it gone unchecked, would have compromised the meat safety standards of Queensland. It is a legacy which would have had serious health risks for all Queenslanders. It is a legacy that this Government is addressing in the interests of providing the best possible meat safety standards for Queenslanders.

On Tuesday night, the member for Crows Nest claimed in this House that the Borbidge Government got the QLMA "back on track". Is it not interesting that the member for Crows Nest is the third Primary Industries spokesman for the National Party this year? I do not know whether the member for Crows Nest speaks to the former member for Barambah, the former Minister for Primary Industries, Trevor Perrett, or whether he speaks to the member for Hinchinbrook, but if he does I would hope that they have explained the real situation to him. I expect from the honourable member's contribution tonight that this has not happened. If the member for Crows Nest is listening, for his benefit I will explain the real situation to him.

On 11 February 1998—two days before he was dumped as Primary Industries Minister—Trevor Perrett wrote to the QLMA chairman, Richie Goldup, referring to a meeting regarding QLMA's projected financial position for the last financial year. I seek leave to table this letter.

Leave granted.

Mrs LAVARCH: In this letter he says—

"In the meeting, my officers explained to you that it would be very unlikely that Queensland Treasury would fund QLMA \$0.55m for C.S.O activities. With this in mind, QLMA's expected loss for the 1997-1998 financial year is—"

and listen to this—

"\$2.25m."

On 14 May last year—the day the last Borbidge/Sheldon Budget was handed down and only days before the election was called—the new and soon to be old Primary Industries Minister, the member for Hinchinbrook, wrote to the QLMA. Do honourable members remember this? I seek leave to table this letter to the QLMA dated 14 May 1998.

Leave granted.

Mrs LAVARCH: In this letter the member for Hinchinbrook admitted that the QLMA faced "potential insolvency". The member for Hinchinbrook was forced to admit it when the QLMA board started to get nervous about the board's personal liability if the QLMA was trading insolvent. If that is what the member for Crows Nest means by "back on track", I would not want him to do my tax return for next year.

There is no doubt that the legacy this Government inherited from the Opposition was disgraceful. As we all know, the former Borbidge Government adopted a very dangerous do nothing approach to the meat processing industry. This was despite a warning from its own Meat Processing Consultative Committee of 6 February last year that if the Government did nothing up to 17 abattoirs would close and 5,000 jobs would be lost over the next five years. I have a copy of the Meat Processing Consultative Committee report and I seek leave to table it.

Leave granted.

Mrs LAVARCH: Interestingly, the member for Crows Nest has claimed that this report is a blueprint for the meat processing industry. If the member believed this, why did he and his colleagues ignore this report? The MPCC report made 22 recommendations for the meat processing industry. One of those recommendations dealt with the Queensland Livestock and Meat Authority. It was ignored. For the benefit of the member for Crows Nest and members opposite, I will remind them of that recommendation. It was as follows—

"The Queensland Government should provide CSO (community service obligation) funding of up to \$550,000 per annum to the Queensland Livestock and Meat Authority (to be reviewed every two years) to meet the cost of activities which cannot be met from the QLMA's fee base (notably policing and enforcement under the Meat Industry Act, Legislative Review, Remote Area Servicing and Domestic Market Promotion)."

We had the member for Surfers Paradise, the Leader of the Opposition, claiming that his Government met its community service obligations. Let us canvass this a bit more. I will read into Hansard an extract from the minutes of the QLMA board meeting from March last year. I seek leave to table that document.

Leave granted.

Mrs LAVARCH: In the minutes, after lamenting the Borbidge Government's rejection of a CSO request in the mid-term budget review, the QLMA board meeting went on to record as follows—

"A subsequent submission for C.S.O funding for the QLMA was included in the recent M.P.C.C report to the Premier (the member for Surfers Paradise).

It was noted that there had been no written response from the Minister, but verbal advice had been received to say that Cabinet had rejected our request for financial assistance."

What this says is that the previous Borbidge Government refused to fund the QLMA. The coalition Government put meat safety at risk and threatened consumer confidence and public health. That was the legacy of those opposite.

The Beattie Labor Government believes that meat safety is too important to be risked. I want to return to the MPCC report. I think it is worth repeating the recommendation. It was as follows—

"The Queensland Government should provide C.S.O (community service obligation) funding of up to \$550,000 per annum to the Queensland Livestock and Meat Authority (to be reviewed every two years) to meet the cost of activities which cannot be met from the Q.L.M.A's fee base (notably policing and enforcement under the Meat Industry Act, Legislative Review, Remote Area Servicing and Domestic Market Promotion)."

The committee attached a comment to each of its recommendations. It is important to note that the comment attached to this recommendation regarding the Queensland Livestock and Meat Authority says—

"The committee has a major concern that Q.L.M.A will not be able to properly fund the activities nominated above from its proposed new accreditation fee structure, even without any moratorium on fee increases as proposed in recommendation C.2.

The inability of Q.L.M.A to effectively enforce the Act from its current revenue base potentially represents a significant food safety risk, especially in the area of illegal slaughtering.

The damage that would be caused to the Queensland meat processing industry from a 'Garibaldi' type food poisoning, and the likely media reaction to one, hardly needs any elaboration."

Let us put this in perspective. The previous Government's own committee told it that if it did not fund the QLMA it threatened to expose Queensland to a significant food safety risk. Those opposite ignored that recommendation.

What has the Labor Government done? This Government has devoted \$800,000 in funding to the QLMA this year alone. This is far in excess of what those opposite wanted to do. We have had a crackdown on illegal meat processing. We have also provided extra funds for a meat safety enforcement unit which, in only four months, has examined 175 cases. A number have already been prosecuted.

The legacy of the Borbidge Government does not stop here. There are other damning reports. I would like to finish with a briefing note that was sent to the member for Hinchinbrook when he was Minister for Primary Industries. In that briefing note the ramifications of ignoring the recommendations of the consultative committee are quite damning. The briefing note is dated 21 April 1998. It states—

"The prospect of Q.L.M.A being made insolvent by the actions of Government would not only have serious consequences politically, but would be of major detriment to the future trade of meat"——

Time expired.
