



Speech by

**Hon. RUSSELL COOPER**

**MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST**

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Hansard 27 April 1999

### **GOVERNMENT ELECTION PROMISES**

**Hon. T. R. COOPER** (Crows Nest—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): I will not offer the Deputy Premier my time. This Beattie Government, in less than 10 months in office, has marched down the same path as the Goss Government. The difference is that, whereas it took Wayne Goss some six years to create the tremendous fear and anger in the bush that helped to see him eventually thrown out, it has taken this Government less than 12 months.

We have heard in this House time and time again of the examples that justify this Government's "can't do" tag. Tonight we have heard more examples. They all revolve around one simple fact: this Government cannot keep its election promise to not increase taxes, fees and charges above the CPI. I will focus on this Government's wholesale assault on the meat industry. Just a couple of weeks ago, during the quiet of Easter, the Primary Industries Minister tried to slip in his massive QLMA fee increases for butchers and meat processors. In fact, it was around April Fools' Day. I suppose the Minister thought he would take them all for fools.

Despite the decision being taken in Cabinet on the Tuesday before Easter, the Minister suppressed this announcement for another stage-managed media announcement on Easter Sunday. Then what did he do? He escaped overseas so that he would not have to defend his actions. He traded the heat of the meat industry for the heat of Saudi Arabia. While he was away he left the member for Mount Isa to proclaim that this increase was in line with the CPI.

But the anger did not subside and eventually the Minister had to return. Since his return we have seen this Government's deliberate campaign of misinformation and deception in regard to these massive fee increases. First the Government tried to claim that these fee increases are in line with CPI—no more than 8%. In actual fact, increases for butchers ranged between 65% for a Category C butcher, requiring only one audit per year, to 315% for a Category A butcher, employing between three and 10 people, producing fresh meat and smallgoods.

How can these figures be so different? That is easy to answer. While the annual accreditation fee has risen by 8%, this Government has been trying to suppress the fact that all audits bar one will be charged at \$100 per hour. They also tried to suppress the fact that this comes on top of the cancellation in July last year of the 30% rebate offered to butchers and meat processors.

When a Category A butcher producing fresh meat and smallgoods and employing between three and 10 people sat down in June last year to write the cheque for his annual fees to the QLMA, he paid a total of \$280. Now, less than one year later, he has to fill out a cheque for \$881. When the true extent of these fee increases was exposed, we then had the spectacle of both the Minister and his Premier whipping up a food safety scare campaign and trying to say that new fees were necessary to guarantee safety and hygiene standards. What rot! The Queensland meat industry has an excellent safety and hygiene record and has led the nation and most other food outlets, and the Minister has publicly conceded that. These massive fee increases are not about boosting safety and hygiene; they are about this Government shirking its funding responsibilities to the QLMA.

Despite its rhetoric and despite its baseless claims to the contrary, this Government will not fund its fair share. The butchers know it, the processors know it and the cattlemen know it. The QLMA is not a company. Between 1993 and 1998 it carried the expense of running two food safety systems—the old inspectorate system and the new Q-Safe system. It carried on, despite the Minister's Labor predecessor Ed Casey ripping out the State Government's annual \$500,000 contribution, and despite

the Goss Government ravaging the DPI for six hard years. When the coalition took office we found that the QLMA had been left in an utter mess. We got it back on track. We funded our fair share and we guaranteed its solvency. All the Government had to do was uphold its rightful commitment, but it did not. It sacked the highly qualified and respected board to appoint its own Labor lackey and now, on the advice of its own Labor lackey, it is plundering the cash registers of small businesses all over the State. That fellow has sold the Minister a dud.

The QLMA is a service provider. It should not be intended to deliver profits to the State Government. That is where Labor and the coalition differ. The end result of massive fee increases is job losses and more small businesses closed down; less competition for cattle; fewer outlets from which to buy fresh meat and, in some towns, no outlets from which to buy fresh meat at all; dearer meat for consumers; and more clout for the big supermarkets. The ones who will be hardest hit will be those in the regions and those in the bush. Do not forget that this is where Goss and his Government started to collapse. Members opposite have done it in 10 solid months. Goss took six years to do it. They are on the wrong tram.

Time expired.

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