



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 16 May 2000

PRODUCT LABELLING

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (6.43 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise to support this motion. It is also a pleasure to see a unified Parliament. As we all agree, the current labelling system is not indicative of the amount of Australian content, ownership or other vital information; nor is there any requirement in relation to labelling at the merchandising end of the process. I find it a damning indictment of the leadership skills of those charged with managing our nation—those who are supposed to be managing it in the best interests of all Australians and providing employment for all Australians—that labelling is not reflective of the true nature of the content of products and the ownership of the company that makes them.

This inaction by Government has led to action by the public, with some store owners taking it into their own hands to ensure that their customers are provided with true information with regard to the origin of the products they are buying. Mr Jeff Antcliff—who is in the gallery tonight with his lovely wife—is a Caboolture Buy-Rite supermarket owner who realised that customers in his store thought that they were buying "true blue Aussie" products when in fact about 85% of those products are foreign owned.

Unlike the Government, he decided to do something about this and introduced into his store a labelling system that identified "true" Australian-owned products. He also offers fully Australian-owned and made products whenever available, alongside the regular brands that are offered in most supermarkets. This practice has been a hit with customers who are pleased with the extra service Jeff provides—a service which allows the customer to play his or her small role in achieving a healthier economy and reduced unemployment.

Jeff's labelling system has now been taken on board by thousands of independent grocers and small businesses throughout the country and he has joined the AusBuy Save Australia campaign. As has been said before, for some years AusBuy has produced a booklet advising of true Australian-owned companies. AusBuy is to be congratulated on its initiative. This research information into the true ownership of companies will most certainly be more successful when provided at a point of sale through accurate product or shelf labelling.

In a media release issued by Jeff recently, he said—

"This campaign is not about rubbishing foreign-owned goods. It's about informing people of what is, and what is not, Australian-owned and manufactured, so they can make their own educated choices. For too long, customers have been buying products in the belief they are supporting Australian enterprises."

Jeff has been inundated with community support, and his move has opened the door to many local manufacturers who suffer marketing problems at the hands of the large retailers and supermarkets. One positive move by a local supermarket owner, and a proud Cabooltureite, has had a multiplier effect within the community and has led to a national awareness tour that is to commence this year.

Despite threats of legal action from a large multinational organisation, Jeff and other like-minded Australians are not deterred. These multinational organisations might control the governments of this country but quite obviously it is a much more difficult and different issue when it comes to controlling the people.

Support for the Save Australia campaign is continually mounting, and it is a clear indication of a much deeper issue within Australian communities. The Northern Times newspaper summed it up recently in an editorial where it stated that the Federal Government needs to take another look at the concept of level playing fields.

I commend the actions of Jeff Antcliff, AusBuy and the many other community-initiated groups which are also pursuing this issue. I wish them well in their upcoming tour and trust that their overwhelming community support will continue. Accurate Australian-owned and made labelling is essential to the wellbeing of our nation. If something is not done now it will be too late, and the notion of Australian-owned will be something that our grandchildren will perhaps vaguely remember as they shuffle their feet in the dole queue.

I wish to remind the member for Capalaba and the Labor Party of a letter to the editor by Mr Welch, the State organiser of the AMWU. The letter read as follows—

"Politicians should: stop lecturing working people about free trade when free trade is not free trade; stop lecturing Australian workers about economic theory and start looking after Australian jobs; stop telling Australian workers we must compete with workers earning around \$US30 a month. The AMWU has a campaign Make It Here Or Jobs Disappear."

The letter further reads—

"... politicians of all political persuasions need to do more for we are not prepared to allow any more imports into this country when significant job losses have been incurred by this industry."

That is a clear message from the AMWU. It says it all. If we do not continue to make things in this country, our jobs will indeed disappear.
