



Speech by

GARY FENLON

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard 16 May 2000

PRODUCT LABELLING

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (6.48 p.m.): I rise to support this motion, which urges the Federal Government to implement a graduated system of labelling to quantify the percentage of Australian ownership and content on products offered for retail sale as a means of facilitating an ongoing Buy Australian campaign. I support this motion because it is a motherhood statement. It is a statement which all Australians should support. It is a fundamental issue in terms of maintaining our domestic production.

However, we must keep in perspective that this is not the main game. The main game lies in the wider international marketplace. If we read Australian industrial history, it is well known that the biggest problem in this country since first settlement has been the fragility and small size of our domestic market. That has always been a fundamental problem in Australian industrial production, and it will continue to be so.

We need to keep the perspective that the main game is the international marketplace. I suggest that this argument is not so much about buying Australian but is about selling Australian manufactured products and produce in the international marketplace. That is the main game: taking us into the international marketplace. It is a place in which there are great winds of change and volatility, but we must stand in it.

Many things must be done in Australia to take us into the international marketplace. It should be noted that an initiative of the Hawke Government was to expand the holdings of Australian superannuation to provide a pool of savings for Australian workers in which to invest and upon which Australian companies could establish a base, especially in terms of venture capital, which is another fragile area of Australia's production infrastructure, apart from the fact that we have a very small marketplace.

They are very constructive initiatives that we must uphold. But more than that, we must have a very strong industry policy to drive our markets. In that respect, I refer to our meat production and export industry, which is one of Australia's great industries and one that is dear to me, having worked in meatworks myself and being the son of a slaughterman, who worked at the Lakes Creek meatworks for 51 years and who was a life member of the Australian meat workers union, the AMIEU. I am very proud of that. I would like more families to grow up with a long-term perspective of being able to work in that industry. My father always said that he feared the prospect of that industry being replaced by live cattle exports. I am not criticising live cattle exports, and I am certainly not criticising the great gains in the new markets that have been created via those means. However, we must build upon that. We must put in place industry policies that focus not only on maintaining meat processing levels for export but also put strategies in place to ensure value adding of meat products, so that families and working people in Queensland and throughout Australia can have some hope in the future. If we can do that for other manufacturing industries—whether it is the aluminium industry in terms of value adding by increasing the production of aluminium windows—we should be able to focus not only on the live cattle export industry but also on value adding in the meat industry in Queensland.
