



Speech by

GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Hansard 16 May 2000

PRODUCT LABELLING

Mr NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (6.37 p.m.): I find the contents of the motion before the House this evening very hard to disagree with, but the issue is not quite as simple as one might think. The honourable member for Ipswich West is basically trying to say to us that we should close the doors and have more tariffs. The difficulty we as a nation have is that we now live in a global economy. We have to accept, face and deal with that. We cannot live in isolation. We are a country with a population of between 18 million and 19 million people.

Dr Prenzler: We are not saying that. We're talking about labelling.

Mr NUTTALL: I understand that, but we need overseas investment.

There is confusion in labelling. When I was first elected to this Parliament in 1992 I went to my local tailor and said to him, "I want several suits. I want them to be made in Australia. I want Australian-made suits." He said, "No problem." I got my suit, I came in here and I told everyone, "I am wearing Australian made." On the inside of the jacket was a tag with the words "manufactured in Spain". What I am getting at is that, while the suit may have been made here in Australia, the material actually came from overseas. That is the difficulty in regard to labelling.

Dr Prenzler: And probably our wool, too.

Mr NUTTALL: And probably our wool. I would not disagree with that. That is the difficulty we have in regard to labelling. I believe that most consumers and most retailers, when dealing with consumable goods and other goods, genuinely try to buy Australian-made goods if they fit within their scales of economy in terms of their budgets.

I agree with the wording of the motion before the House. It is very difficult to discover whether the product is made in Australia and whether the components of the product are Australian. This applies regardless of whether the product is jam, tyres or something else. As previous speakers have said, the logo of a triangle containing a kangaroo does not always inform consumers as to whether a particular product is an Australian product from start to finish.

That having been said, we need to be careful that we do not become introverted. Australian companies export overseas. Indeed, some Australian companies have established themselves overseas and are doing very well. As a nation, it is important that we have good exports. It is important to us that people overseas buy Australian products. It is not enough to say that we should buy only Australian products. We live in a global economy.

The other issue is that of jobs. Even though in some instances we do not like overseas investment, the reality is that a number of overseas companies are present in Australia. Examples of overseas companies that young people see in our electorates are the fast food chains. Those companies have come from overseas, but most of the products they sell are either Australian made or Australian grown. We should be prepared to welcome overseas investment. I realise that a lot of the profits made by those companies end up overseas. However, we must bear in mind that overseas companies operating in Australia buy and sell Australian-made products.

It is difficult to ensure that labelling quantifies the percentage of Australian ownership of the product. It is necessary that the consumer reads the label. If one picks up a tin of baked beans or a packet of biscuits it is not always easy to discover the origin of the product.

Time expired.
