



Speech by

Mr LEN STEPHAN

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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COMPETITION POLICY REFORM [QUEENSLAND] BILL

Mr STEPHAN (Gympie—NPA) (8.45 p.m.): This evening my contribution to this debate will be brief, bearing in mind that there has been considerable debate over time on this subject. We will continue to see competition. However, there will be times when the competition becomes intense and comes at a cost to those who have been delivering services over a long period. For example, at the moment dairy farmers throughout the State are nervous about the future of their industry, which has served people in the cities and towns of this country and overseas for a long time. The farmers need our support on this issue.

Farmers mean food—food for Australians and for those in other parts of the world. We are not talking about luxury items. Our farmers are facing many hardships. Rural people have been doing it tough for the last 40 or 50 years. We should take a moment to realise just how difficult it is for our farmers.

The Gympie Show was held recently. If honourable members had attended the show, they would know that about 250 dairy cattle and more than 300 beef cattle were put to the test. That goes to show what can be and is being done by rural communities. They are doing their job very well indeed. I say "Well done" to them. They are going through a very difficult period at the moment.

Deregulation has also taken place in the banking industry. Not many honourable members would suggest that this has amounted to anything positive. Deregulation has made life very difficult for a lot of people in country areas who rely on banks and the services that they provide. The flow-on effect is disastrous for Queensland. We must surely realise that a lesson is to be learned from this. We have to look at the effect of this policy of deregulation on industry. In my own area, for instance, the dairy industry is worth about \$52m a year not just to primary producers, but to processors and suppliers as well. Local businesses derive a great deal of benefit from the dairy industry, even though it is struggling.

Mr Fenlon: You should be on the front bench, I think.

Mr STEPHAN: The funding that the Federal Government is going to provide to support new industries is to be commended, particularly in the area of retraining for those who will have to go into other businesses. It makes every one of us realise that it is difficult for those who are doing the right thing and it is difficult for those who are trying to do the right thing. I commend the Federal Government for that program.

We need to acknowledge just how tough life will be for dairy farmers following deregulation. It is going to be a very, very difficult period. I believe that this is just the beginning. Deregulation is not going to go away. It is not going to affect just one segment of the community; quite a number of different sections of communities will suffer. That is especially so when people are shifting from one business to another; they are taking their equity with them. We must realise that it is going to be very, very difficult to turn the wheel around.

We can also look at what is happening in other countries. I do not believe that the USA, for example, is doing anything but supporting its industries. I will just leave that comment with honourable members. It looks after its industries and looks after the people who work in those industries. It is a bit like a hare chasing its tail: it does not catch up with it. The USA is giving its own industries some support, and that is exactly what we should be doing.