



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 31 May 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

South Burnett Meatworks

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.33 a.m.), by leave: The Queensland Government has secured an agreement that will allow the South Burnett Meatworks to reopen in October. The Government has reached agreement with meat processors Bindaree Beef, a well-established operator in New South Wales with a significant output from its two plants in Orange and Inverell bound for export markets. Our announcement last week came after months of work behind the scenes to save the jobs of the 230 people who worked at the meatworks. This is a great relief to the community of Murgon. Indeed, it saves the community of Murgon in its current form.

I always said that my Government would try to assist, but I was equally adamant that the answer to this situation was not a Government takeover. The answer was always going to be for the Government to find a buyer. And that is what we have done. The deal involves four departments and assistance in areas such as training and value adding, which provides us with the assurance that Bindaree Beef is here for the long haul and is determined to make this a success. The net result is that the abattoir, which is the largest employer in Murgon, will remain viable and continue to employ people. I know that a lot of the seasonal work force has already left town, but having the abattoir reopening will mean either that they will return or that some people who would otherwise be out of work will now have a job.

A major element of the Government's assistance relates to help with the water supply for the meatworks. The State Government is providing \$1.7m to the Murgon Shire Council to upgrade the town's water supply and provide enough water for the abattoir. In addition, the Government will also provide assistance in training for staff, environmental upgrades of the abattoir, refund of stamp duty on the sale of the abattoir, and assistance for specialised machinery to further promote value adding to the raw product of the meatworks.

Having the South Burnett Meatworks reopen means that local farmers who want their kill at Murgon can retain that, while Queensland cattle currently being processed in New South Wales by Bindaree will now be processed in Murgon. This morning the Deputy Premier and I have been discussing this matter. From the meeting I had with the owners of Bindaree it was clear that they were keen to slaughter New South Wales beef here rather than the other way around, with Queensland beef going to New South Wales. This demonstrates our long-term commitment to Queensland's meat processing sector, which employs more than 15,000 people. The State Government wants to encourage the private sector to explore new opportunities, such as value adding and servicing niche markets.

When we came to office, we were presented with a report from the Borbidge administration warning that 17 abattoirs would close and 5,000 jobs would be lost if the Government did not put in place a plan to revive the industry. We acted quickly and in October 1998 we established the \$20m Queensland Meat Processing Development Initiative and formed a task force to work with industry to identify opportunities, facilitate new investment and reinvestment in the industry, identifying and coordinating market development missions. The Deputy Premier, the Minister for Primary Industries and I will continue to deliver to ensure that this State has a solid meat industry.
