



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 8 September 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Murgon Meatworks

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.32 a.m.), by leave: Today I will take great pleasure in officially re-opening the Murgon meatworks and the saving of at least 230 jobs. The reopening of Murgon meatworks is proof of the State Government's commitment to regional Queensland and to working in partnership with the private sector.

The reality is that it is unlikely that we will ever win seats in this area—although hope springs eternal—but I promised we would be a Government for all Queensland and proof of that is Government investment of \$1.7m in this meatworks and at least 230 jobs. Government support includes \$1.7m to upgrade the water supply for the town and abattoir, as well as additional assistance for staff training, an environmental upgrade of the meatworks and a refund of stamp duty on the sale of the facility.

The help my Government will provide with the provision of specialised value-adding equipment will set the Murgon meatworks on a firm footing to become a major contributor to Queensland's export earnings. But it is an Aussie company that took the risk and the initiative in the first place and I want to congratulate Bindaree Beef, its Chairman John MacDonald and the board of directors for putting their faith—and their money—in this project. I met with them; they are very decent Australians. I would particularly single out Leigh Belbeck, the human resources manager, who has invested a great deal of time and effort to make today possible. Bindaree has assured us the minimum work force will initially comprise 230 people, with plans to expand capacity over the next four years and so create more jobs.

In supporting this venture through active and constructive Government assistance, my Government is fulfilling two key policy priorities—job creation in sustainable export industries and rebuilding regional Queensland. In the last year export revenue from the meat industry increased to over \$1.3 billion. This makes it the State's second largest export after coal, contributing about half of Australia's total export earnings from the meat industry. These achievements have been made with the active assistance of my Government and the assistance that has been provided through the Meat Industry Task Force.

In addition to Murgon, we have helped Consolidated Meat develop processing facilities at Rockhampton, and supported the refurbishment of the Cannon Hill meatworks. We are giving a robust industry that participates in a fiercely competitive international environment the boost it needs to ensure its long-term future as a major global player. We are showing the rest of Australia that, with determination and the resources to back it up, we can play an active role in rebuilding regional areas. We will not stand idly by to watch regional towns decline and whither.

In cooperation with local communities and business we can help regional Queensland survive and prosper. We have committed more than \$12m to assist companies wanting to establish sustainable export-focused or import replacement value-adding meat processing activities in Queensland. As a result, the industry is committed to capital investment of more than \$200m, and to the creation of more than 2,000 jobs throughout the State.

The Meat Industry Task Force has conservatively estimated that, over the next two years, applications for further funding will generate a further 2,000 to 3,000 jobs in the meat industry. These jobs are sustainable in the long term, and represent a broadening of the State's economic base through value-adding, another high Government priority.

I should say that when we came to office a report that had been prepared for the previous Government, if I recall correctly, had indicated that the meat industry was in enormous difficulty and would be losing something like 5,000 jobs. We have turned that around. We have turned that around for the future of this State. We acted, we turned it around, and it is one of the significant achievements of my Government.

Mr Rowell: What a joke.

Mr BEATTIE: In two years and four months the Borbidge Government—

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Let us be really clear. The previous Government's strategy in relation to the meat industry would have seen the Queensland meat industry exported to New South Wales or overseas and a significant part of it closed down. This Government has done more to assist the Queensland meat industry than any Government in the last 25 years—and that is a fact. Both the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Training have been key players in making this happen, along with the meat task force and I want to publicly thank that meat task force for what it has achieved.

When it comes to jobs, the contrast between my Government and the previous Government is clear, and this is very interesting. In two years and four months the Borbidge Government could create only 78,900 jobs—78,900 jobs. In the first two years and two months of my Government, we have created 101,200. We are 22,300 jobs ahead of the legacy we inherited from the Borbidge Government—over a lesser period of time—and we still have two months to go before we have served the same period. I will repeat it: 22,300 more jobs under my Government than were created under the Borbidge Government and they were there for two months longer.

What is the difference? The difference is we set a jobs target. We set out to do something about unacceptably high unemployment, whereas the coalition just shrugged its shoulders and left it to market forces. In May 1997, the Borbidge/Sheldon Government said it could do nothing about unemployment. As it was leaving Government, its message to Queensland was that unemployment would rise.

But people expect Governments to make a difference and I was determined that a Labor Government would do everything it could to create jobs. That is why I set a target of reducing unemployment to 5% within five years. It has meant we have focused on job creation every day, seven days a week. The result has been that the National/Liberal coalition has whinged that we should not have set a target. The result has been that we have created 22,300 more jobs than the National/Liberal coalition Government—and we have not finished yet.

The result is that we have 22,300 reasons why my Government should be re-elected and 22,300 reasons why the coalition should be left to whinge on the Opposition benches.
