



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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EMPLOYMENT

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (6.25 p.m.): This Beattie Government has been on about creating jobs and job opportunities throughout regional Queensland. We are trying to take Queensland from being a bulk commodities exporter to a place which value adds in the processed food sector. This is not easy because, firstly, we have to work out what we are marketing and who is our competition and, secondly, we need to see if we can grow the product and put it into a market at a cheaper price than our competitors and at the same time actively provide assistance to kick-start these industries. The best example of this is the meat industry.

The Government acted to revitalise the Queensland meat industry by establishing the Meat Processing Task Force in October 1998 as a one-stop shop for industry to facilitate new investment and re-investment, encourage the retention of successful business, and identify and coordinate opportunities for developing a world competitive industry. The task force also administers the Queensland meat processing development initiative, a \$20m, three-year program of financial assistance to industry proponents establishing sustainable export or import replacement value adding activities in Queensland. The task force comprises officers from the Department of State Development, the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Since its inception, the task force has—

- implemented plans for the sale and redevelopment of Queensland Abattoir Corporation sites with a particular emphasis on further value adding, investment, and job retention and creation;
- provided financial assistance to beef processors, pork processors and chicken processors;
- received expressions of interest from 10 other projects under examination;
- facilitated the creation of over 2,000 jobs and \$200m of capital expenditure from the QMPDI grants made to date;
- assisted 26 companies under the WorkCover assistance scheme;
- assisted the Biloela abattoir to extend to a second shift by resolving problems with water access;
- commenced programs to improve supply chains to beef and pork abattoirs; and
- conducted studies and implemented programs to significantly improve training in the industry.

In Mackay, Thomas Borthwick & Sons, an export meat processing plant, has been a beneficiary of this revitalisation by the Meat Industry Task Force. The plant, which is located at Bakers Creek, employs about 400 people and processes about 750 head a day. As a major employer, the plant contributes significantly to the Mackay economy. However, due to its location, which is adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, the plant will not meet new environmental regulations pertaining to the discharge of effluent. Borthwick & Sons, the task force, the Mackay City Council and I have been working through the issues relating to discharge. It is really through this cooperative approach that a solution has been formulated which will satisfy the environmental concerns and provide water for irrigation, which will assist other industries.

This issue was the major stumbling block to Borthwick's vision of increasing production at its plant from 750 head a day to at least 1,250 head a day. This increase in production will require a second shift, thus creating a further 200 jobs. Now that Borthwicks can see a solution, it has now

embarked on a major upgrade of the plant to cater for the increase in production and more jobs. The Government will also provide assistance if required to train the additional new staff.

It is not just large processing plants that have benefited from the assistance of the task force. A family owned company operated by the Brand brothers in Mackay manufactured a product called Mackay's Own Beef Jerky. They approached me about accessing assistance to restart their manufacturing business. The company had run into some compliance problems and was forced to close its manufacturing operations.

This operation supplied beef jerky to many outlets in the Mackay region. There was an uproar when customers could not get their favourite beef jerky product. I contacted Bob McCarthy at the Meat Industry Task Force. He was able to provide a consultant who assisted the company with its compliance. In the discussions I had with the Brand brothers company, I asked where it wanted to be in the future. It started thinking about national and global markets. When it thought about it, it said, "Where do we go?" I then put it in contact with Borthwicks. Through this association, it now operates out of a kitchen at the meatworks. That business is growing, because Borthwicks has the marketing experience and the Brand brothers have the product.

Time expired.
