



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL, MLA STATE MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Hansard 16 October 2001

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (4.11 p.m.): The Primary Industries Legislation Amendment Bill is an omnibus bill. I will refer first to the Meat Industry Act. Through this bill we are divesting ourselves of the Abattoir Corporation.

It was very interesting to hear the member for Gregory speak about health regulations. Australia has a reputation for being clean and green because we have stringent health regulations. In order to understand how we gained that reputation members should ask their fellow members who have been on parliamentary delegations to some of the Asian countries, where goods are sold on the roadside, to compare our requirements with theirs. For example, in Vietnam one of the significant public health issues is goods being sold near the street corners. It causes a public health problem. We have stringent public health requirements in this country in order to avoid that situation, and I do not for one second want to see those watered down.

Ms Nelson-Carr: Mad cow disease.

Mr MICKEL: The member mentions mad cow disease. Mad cow disease is currently in Japan, the largest importer of Australian beef. I hope that the Australian product is not interfered with, because of our well-deserved reputation for supplying quality beef products there. I will develop that point in a moment.

The honourable member for Gregory also referred to family owned enterprises. I particularly congratulate a family owned enterprise that took over a government-owned abattoir at Cannon Hill, namely, the Lee family. Trevor Lee, in his establishment of Australian Country Choice, has developed a supply chain from the farm right through to the plate. It is an excellent, world-class facility developed in conjunction with the Queensland government by grants from the Queensland government, enabling a family firm to continue to employ hundreds of Queenslanders. They are the sorts of world-class facilities and job creation projects that the Food and Meat Task Force and the Department of Primary Industries, working together, have been able to develop.

I also pay tribute to groups such as AMH, which is based at Dinmore outside Ipswich. The honourable member for Gregory spoke about the health requirements. As a result of the significant investment by AMH, we can now trace meat back to the paddock from which the animal came if there is a health issue. The ability to make a quick response to a health threat saves our beef industry. It is what puts it at the forefront of the competition.

I give fair warning to the members around Ipswich that when the next shift at AMH is put on—that will be another 600 jobs—I want the people in Logan city, in west Logan city in particular, to be able to benefit from those jobs. I will not tell members what I will do, but when I hear about those jobs being available I will make sure that the people in west Logan city are the ones fighting other people in Ipswich for those jobs. And I make no apologies for it.

The point about the Australian work force in the meat processing industry is that by world standards it is first class. It is a sector unlike that in America. In Australia we have to take on what is called the 'licorice allsorts' that are presented by producers. All sorts of breeds come before the processors daily. The Australian work force—the Queensland work force—is skilled enough to deal with that in a world competitive fashion. By contrast, in the United States, because of the extensive feedlotting, the same variety tends to come through, which makes processing easier. I pay tribute to the employees in the large and smaller meatworks around Queensland for the excellent job they do.

I also pay tribute to those meat processors in regional areas, such as Nolans at Gympie, who have developed a significant niche market, particularly in the restaurant industry. Also, the Warwick Bacon Factory has developed an excellent product in the Japanese market, creating jobs in regional Queensland. The message is that we do have a world-class processing sector with well-trained employees.

I know that the sector has improved, but we need to encourage producers to continue to dehorn their animals for when they are presented at the processing plants. When the animals are being herded up, one animal with a horn can bruise the meat or mark the hide of another animal, which makes that hide less valuable.

From a health point of view we have to work towards reaching the stage where primary producers give inoculations in a particular section of the beast so that when processors bone the animal they know where the cysts are likely to be. For example, I saw a situation in Innisfail whereby the entire plant was closed down because a cyst exploded on the factory floor, causing contamination to the meat that had been processed in the previous few minutes. The whole place had to be closed down and hosed out in order to enable a healthy situation to be restored in that plant. I encourage DPI particularly to work with the producers to see if it is possible to have inoculations for animals given in a particular part of the beast so that the processors know exactly what they are dealing with.

The honourable member for Hinchinbrook mentioned earlier the value that beef cattle are bringing at the moment. These days there is also a particular value in the hides, but that value is diminished if the brand is put right in the middle of the hide. In some of the processing plants I visited I saw evidence of producers diminishing their returns by inappropriate placement of brands.

I mention live cattle. In particular I am encouraged by the Queensland export of live cattle to Vietnam. The reason is that I believe, in time, that live cattle export will produce processing jobs for Queensland. The live cattle trade to Japan ultimately resulted in the trading of frozen boxed beef to the Japanese market. It is now our single biggest export. I encourage people to export live cattle to Vietnam, with the ultimate aim that we will be exporting frozen beef carcasses or frozen boxed beef.

In a recent visit I made to Singapore there was no doubt that we have supermarket market dominance in red beef there. Singapore still is a significant footprint on exports to other Asian markets. There is a significant presence of Australian red beef even in the wet markets, which tend to be free and easy. So it is certainly fantastic news for Australian primary producers and particularly Queensland primary producers.

While dealing with the meat industry, I want to mention also the pork industry. Last year we had the nipah virus in Malaysia, which presented an opportunity for Australian pork production to get into exports. It was not many years ago that Queensland pork producers were in a protest meeting spearheaded by, of all people, Pauline Hanson about the import of pork products into this nation. The important news is this: we are still importing a lot of pork product. So why is there not a protest? There is not a protest because, for the first time in our history, we are exporting significant volumes of prime pork cuts. In the supermarkets in Singapore in August, the air-fresh pork product of Singapore was also in almost complete dominance. We have a very large export firm—thanks to the help of State Development in Swickers at Kingaroy, which is helping to improve that market dominance and creating jobs in regional Queensland.

I also want to mention the contribution being played by Nippon Meats with its investment at Cecil Plains. I also want to congratulate the work being done in the Warwick area by the Miantetta piggeries. Last year we gave them a Premier's export award. They have a first-class export culture which their work force shares and they sell a first-class product onto the market.

Mr Palaszczuk: That is Ian Neilson?

Mr MICKEL: Absolutely—Ian Neilson. I want to congratulate Ian Neilson on the job he does in promoting that export culture, which is really needed there.

I also want to mention this afternoon—and the minister will be thrilled when he hears this—that in August, even in the fresh food and vegetable markets, Australia, and Queensland particularly, had a significant market presence. For example, in the Liberty store, which is the one that showcases American products in Orchard Road in Singapore, Caboolture strawberries were on display there. It was wonderful to see people from the Caboolture area selling their product as a fresh product in the strawberry line. The point is we were beating the Americans at their own game.

This afternoon I want to mention the importance of processed foods. I want to draw this comparison: at the 1980 Olympic Games in Montreal, I think Australia won either one gold medal or no gold medals at all. The upshot was this: there was such outrage amongst the people in the nation that they set up the Australian Institute of Sport, culminating, of course, in our wonderful success last year in Sydney. I want to mention somebody who won a gold medal in food processing—a gentleman on the Gold Coast named Peter Ingall from Mayfields Chocolate. He took his product to the premier place in the world for making chocolate, namely, Belgium. And what did he do there? He won the gold

medal—the world gold medal—for chocolate making. Whereas I am enthused about that, the fact is there was no ticker tape parade for Peter. Nobody said what a great achievement that was. He shared his victory alone.

I would like it to be that a gold medal performance like that would encourage our federal government to get in and promote research and development. Instead of that, what have we seen? A cutback—a continual cutback—in research and development. It is a disgrace. The Labor Party's Knowledge Nation, of course, looks at research and development—that is the heart of Knowledge Nation—but there is no response and no encouragement for people like Peter Ingall in developing his product.

So that is why I want to pay tribute to a whole lot of people who are showcasing their products in Singapore. Last year when I went to Singapore the Fair Price Supermarket management met with me and indicated that they were willing to showcase Queensland products and Australian products if we could get them together. And I am pleased to say that, through the help of the Department of Trade and the Premier's Department and Supermarket to Asia, a number of Queensland firms have taken up that opportunity. So this afternoon I want to mention Australian Garlic Bread from Capalaba; Buderim Ginger from Yandina; Gelati Italia from Cararra; George Westons Foods Ltd from Kedron; Golden Circle Limited at Virginia; the Health Revolution at Ashmore; Day Dawn Holdings Pty Ltd of Sumner Park; Nerada Tea at Sunnybank Hills; the Paper Converting Company in my own electorate at Crestmead; Pauls Limited at South Brisbane; Suncoast Gold Macadamia; Weis Australia; Asian Foods Australia from Cairns; and Matthew James International.

Since I received this document I have received another interesting note, and it is this: in the past couple of weeks Suncoast Gold Macadamia and Australian Garlic Bread are both performing strongly in that supermarket, and Supermarket to Asia is working hard with a number of supermarkets to get those products branded and placed extensively in supermarkets throughout Singapore. In other words, we will be creating more Queensland jobs or more Queensland job opportunities as a direct result of that export effort. We need to be identifying those companies that have something special and working with them to ensure the capabilities of supply and developing a strong Queensland supermarket supply business.

I should also point out and acknowledge the fantastic work being done by the Queensland supermarket product of the year award winners—people like Medihoney Active, who have been treating bacterial throat infections with their product.

Mr Palaszczuk: That is Capilano.

Mr MICKEL: Yes, in the minister's electorate. The runner-up was Health Revolution from the Gold Coast—last year's inaugural winner—with a new light bar range of blueberry and apricot varieties, the world's first gluten-free, fruit-filled, low-fat, low-allergy health food bars on the market. The No. 3 was Jewellest Pty Ltd from Cairns, who have value added to mango growers' seconds, achieving fresh mango with up to eight weeks shelf life under refrigeration, providing a product that is ready to eat, no peeling, no waste, no seeds. The No 4. went to Sunshine Foods for their 99 per cent fat-free balsamic vinaigrette. And No. 5 went to Gold Coast Tender Plus for their range of sandwich fillers.

In other words, there is significant regional opportunity and significant regional success in all of these things. So when people say we need to be promoting regional Queensland, they are dead right. And if you are from the Gold Coast, that is the place to be doing it as well, because they are the ones up there and winning at the moment. So there is every reason to be up-beat about Queensland's positioning provided we get together and give them that helping hand that Supermarket to Asia, the Department of Trade and Queensland State Development are providing.

The other thing that this act mentions this afternoon is the dairy industry. We have heard a lot about deregulation in Queensland. I know this has been painful in some districts. But the reality is this: when it comes to exports, dairying is a \$2.2 billion industry this year. And in Singapore at the moment Australia has significant dominance right across the food processing sector in dairying as well as in the fresh milk marketing sector in the dairy industry.

That opportunity has come about because we have made our dairy industry export efficient—\$2.2 billion worth of income for dairying companies and ultimately primary producers will share in that. So it goes without saying that we have to encourage our primary producing sector. We are winning when it comes to food processing, but under no circumstances can we afford to rest on our laurels. That is why we need a significant injection of research and development capability to help all of those firms in regional Queensland that may be off the beaten track when it comes to information. We need to make those firms information rich by making sure that they are aware of the latest grants that are available to help them or the latest professional advice that is available to help them. I encourage firms that want to get into the Supermarket to Asia program in Singapore to contact Alan Jebb, who is a remarkable officer. He is very passionate about the fact that we need to develop these markets in Singapore and, through Singapore, the rest of Asia.

I encourage the minister to keep on with the professional advice that I know his department offers to primary producers. I am also up-beat about our chances of developing better markets throughout Asia as a direct result of the contribution made by firms throughout regional Queensland.
