



Speech by

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TRADING HOURS

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (12.17 p.m.): The current application before the Industrial Relations Commission again brings forward the debate on trading hours and, specifically, Sunday trading for the major retailers. This is a difficult issue and one that has again been brought before the Industrial Relations Commission to decide. But I think it is becoming apparent that the applicants will simply continue to bring this issue forward until the commission gives them the answer that they want.

There has been an incremental widening of the laws with multiple applications lodged, and it is now becoming an issue in which a political decision must be made. The current proposal is to extend trading hours to Sundays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the Brisbane suburbs bordered by Caboolture, Samford, Ipswich and Beenleigh and the east coast, where shops would be able to open at their discretion. This is, however, simply a further step towards the total deregulation of shopping hours statewide.

Many people decry the market domination of the big three retailers—or now, with the demise of Franklins, the big two retailers—which currently hold approximately 87 per cent of the retail market in Australia, and it is growing every day. This level of market concentration is to the detriment of producers, processors, manufacturers, small business and the consumer, all of whom will ultimately pay the price.

We have seen only recently, in a very public way, the dangers associated with such market concentration with the deregulation of the dairy industry. The power that the majors wield at the expense of producers, processors and consumers is there for all to see and is replicated in many other industries. There has been much debate into how to limit the growth in this market domination, with little success, and it is my opinion that the only way to limit that monopoly is to maintain some control on trading hours. There is only one reason why the majors are pushing for longer trading hours, that is, to increase their market share and their profitability.

Many surveys will be quoted during this debate that will tell us that consumers want Sunday trading, and they will be surveys that are conducted by the majors. And, of course, as all of us know, they will get the answer they want if they structure the question to get the desired result. But if you ask, 'Do you support Sunday trading for major retailers?' and state the consequence thereof, such as 'if it means your local butcher, corner store or greengrocer will close down', a very different answer will be obtained.

We must protect these small businesses not only to avoid the problems associated with intense market domination in the retail market but also because of the role that small businesses play in our community. Not only are these small businesses the economic engine room of our society; they also provide the employment we need in our communities, and they provide the support that is essential for the survival of our community groups and sporting clubs. When was the last time any of us saw our local touch football club or our local school swimming club sponsored by Woolworths?

The major retailers will say that there will be a huge boost in employment with the introduction of Sunday trading. But this does not take into account the job losses and the business closures that will be experienced by small business. There was a huge effect on small business when the first extension of trading hours was introduced. With late night shopping every night of the week, many small businesses suffered, with some closing. And those who survived are only now recovering. An extension of trading hours and a further shift in market share to the majors would see a corresponding shift in employment figures from full-time to part-time employment, reflecting the employee profiles of the majors as opposed to small business. The commission ruled on 20 November 1998, on the application that was then before it for Sunday trading, that the additional jobs created would not likely cover job losses in small stores.

We must also ask ourselves: do we value small business enough to help them not only to survive but also to protect to some extent their quality of life? Where a large company can open for longer hours being covered by a large work force, many small businesses struggle. To open one extra day, when it is only a couple running the business, takes a huge effort, and it takes its toll on those operators. To open an extra day, with only a marginal increase in returns at best, is a huge burden for these small businesses to bear.

This is an issue that can no longer be let go on ad infinitum. It is a political issue vital to the health of our society and it demands a political solution that we will be continuing to fight for.
