



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 30 April 2003

**FOOD PRODUCTION [SAFETY] REGULATION 2002**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (8.45 p.m.): I rise to second the disallowance motion that has been moved by the member for Southern Downs and the Leader of the Opposition to disallow the Food Production Safety Regulation 2002. As the Leader of the Opposition has outlined, we moved to disallow this regulation because of the impact it will have on Queensland's dairy farmers, which is totally unjustifiable.

There are two elements to the reason this parliament should disallow this regulation introduced by the Minister for Primary Industries. The first element is that the costs this regulation imposes on Queensland dairy farmers for their inspection and accreditation cannot be justified. The second element is the unfairness of visiting that impact on this group of Queenslanders at this time, given that they have suffered the rigours of deregulation and are continuing to suffer the rigours of deregulation and, of course, the impact of the current drought which is continuing in many areas.

I will deal with those two elements one at a time. The costs that this regulation imposes simply cannot be justified. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that this is simply another grab for money by a state government that is increasingly exhibiting signs of being in deep financial trouble. We have seen a number of regulations introduced into this House. We have seen a range of fees and charges across-the-board that have been increased at every opportunity. The opposition has come in here on every occasion and moved to disallow those regulations. We will continue to do so. Treasury has sent out an advice to almost every government department to wind up their fees and charges in every area. We have seen that happen in respect of a wide range of fees and charges over the past couple of months. It is symptomatic of a government grasping for money at every opportunity, as is the case with the regulation we are speaking about tonight.

The fee now costs dairy farmers about \$250. That is approximately what it costs them in other states. Under this new regulation, the subject of the disallowance motion tonight, it will cost dairy farmers somewhere between \$620 and \$750. Dairy farmers in my electorate—my constituents—will be facing a cost of some \$750 a year. It is easy for government backbenchers to say that is not much and will not make a lot of difference in the context of the annual budget of a business, but it is the injustice and the unfairness of that sort of fee increase that has caused a lot of justifiable and understandable anger amongst the people I represent. There has been no attempt to justify it.

Why has the fee gone from \$250 to \$750? How can that 300 per cent increase be justified? When we look at what is involved in the actual accreditation and auditing process that is part and parcel of achieving the accreditation under this regulation, we see it is almost impossible to say that the work and effort involved justifies a 300 per cent rise in the fee or justifies a \$750 charge for that service.

As the member for Southern Downs outlined, most of the processing and handling of milk does not happen on the farm. Basically, on a dairy farm the milk is harvested, stored and loaded on to a truck and transported to another place where the process is carried out. In terms of comparison with a food processing plant, there is not a lot of activity on a dairy farm that requires the level of auditing and accreditation that would justify a fee of \$750.

To date, fees for that activity in Queensland and other states have been around \$250. That is about how much the job has been worth. But now, without the service that is provided for that fee changing markedly, we see a 300 per cent rise in that fee. That is what deregulation is imposing upon Queensland dairy farmers. There is no justification for it.

Part of the reason for moving a disallowance motion in this parliament is to call the minister to account, to force him to stand up in the parliament and explain to the people of Queensland why there needs to be a 300 per cent rise in this fee; to stand up here and explain to the dairy farmers of Queensland why he is imposing a \$750 fee upon their businesses and how it can be justified. As the member for Southern Downs has outlined, previously the minister has refused to do that in answer to questions on notice. Tonight, the minister has an opportunity to meet his responsibility and stand up here and justify why he is ripping \$750 off every dairy farmer in Queensland at this time.

And what a time to do it! What a time for the minister to stick his hand in the pockets of Queensland dairy farmers and rip them off for \$750! What a time for a callous, uncaring government to embark on such an activity against a group of people who, by anybody's standards, have done it hard! They have done it tough. Dairy deregulation has left in its wake a tale of human hardship and human tragedy that is almost impossible to overstate.

Many of my constituents and many of the constituents of members who represent other areas of rural and regional Queensland have been caught up in the madness of the dairy industry deregulation. They have seen their incomes fall and have seen their businesses destroyed while the supermarkets and the big chain stores have profited from the industry to an extent that they were never able to do before deregulation. All of the profits that were traditionally made by that industry have been gobbled up by those who have the market power. It is an example of what happens when industries are totally deregulated, when there is an imbalance of power between the players in the industry. That has caused an enormous amount of angst and an enormous amount of human misery for those people who are struggling to maintain their businesses, who are struggling to keep their business going, who are battling on a knife's edge between viability and financial ruin. And along comes the government and it sticks its hands in those people's pockets for \$750!

That amount of money is not much for people who are doing well. It is not much if people are on a big salary and they are coasting along pretty fine. But when people are on a knife's edge and they are battling every month to pay the bills, to get enough money to keep their businesses going, when they are trying to hold on and they are struggling to somehow get through from one month to another, that \$750 has a massive impact. It also has a philosophical impact. It makes people understandably angry. It gives them a point upon which to visit their frustrations. And so it should.

The other reason that this is an incredibly bad time to impose this type of hand-in-the-pocket trebling of fees is, of course, the seasonal conditions and the drought that has impacted on a whole range of primary producers in Queensland. This government has been totally false in its approach to the drought and totally hypocritical in its statements about how it has been prepared to make every effort in terms of helping people who have been impacted by the drought. This fee that is the subject of this disallowance motion is a great example, even if there were no other, of just how hypocritical this state government is in its response to people who have been impacted by the drought. Instead of helping them, the government sticks its hand in their pockets and pinches \$750. That is what this minister does for people who are impacted by the drought in Queensland.

Time expired.