



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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**SUGAR INDUSTRY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL [No. 2]**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.33 p.m.): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the sugar industry in this parliament this afternoon. I would preface that contribution by saying that some of the contributions we have already heard from the government members on this legislation indicate to me clearly why this piece of legislation has been so soundly rejected by the industry. The Labor government has chosen once again to try to turn this issue into a political football, to try to play the politics of the issue, and to ignore the reality and the details that are all too real for those people who are tied up intimately in the industry on a day-to-day basis.

Some of the contributions we have heard in the parliament this afternoon have been the same old tired political rhetoric that we hear in this parliament every time there is a debate that concerns rural industry, and especially every time there is a debate about regulation or deregulation or the other options that are available to those rural industries.

We hear the same old economic rhetoric that is very fine sounding, I am sure, to those who mouth it with such passion and so little understanding. The member for Logan would have to be the prime example of that. I just wonder how much the member for Logan understood what he said. I wonder if he, in his wildest dreams, can imagine how absolutely irrelevant that contribution would seem to the individuals who have to deal with the reality of this legislation and the impact of this legislation on their lives, their businesses, their communities and their families. That is the reality that never reaches this place in the contributions of the government members. Instead we have this nonsense that is straight out of economic textbooks and a million miles removed from the reality that people have to endure as a result and a consequence of the decisions that the government in this House takes. That is the tragedy of this debate. I have sat and listened to much of it this afternoon.

Given the harsh reality of the numbers in this House, this legislation is going to be passed, and there is not much that any of us on this side of the chamber can do, except to add our voice to that of the opposition spokesman and the member for Hinchinbrook. He has an intimate knowledge of the industry and was able to give the House a very detailed explanation of the reality of the effects of this legislation, not just on the people he represents in the electorate of Hinchinbrook but everybody who is touched by the sugar industry. That is a big proportion of Queenslanders. It is a big proportion of north Queenslanders especially, where this industry has always been a major contributor to the economic base of the communities up and down the coast that were, in a great many cases, established because of the sugar industry and would never have been there but for the sugar industry.

The member for Hinchinbrook was able to outline in detail the effects and the impacts of this legislation on those people who are involved in the sugar industry today. I fear his argument was totally ignored by so many of the members on the other side of the House.

As the member for Hinchinbrook indicated, we will be opposing this legislation because it is more about playing politics in this parliament and in the media than it is about doing anything real for the people who are involved in the sugar industry or the communities that depend on it. That is an opportunity that this parliament and this government will walk away from, because there has been an agreement. The member for Logan referred to the agreement that was reached between the Queensland government and the federal government in terms of the MOU that was signed, although he misrepresented it quite deliberately.

I do not believe that the legislation that has been introduced into the parliament is in the spirit of that agreement, and that in itself is sufficient reason for this parliament to reject it. Quite apart from the detailed impact on the industry that the member for Hinchinbrook referred to and that I will not attempt to emulate, because I do not have the technical knowledge of the industry—I could never possibly begin to understand the industry to the same extent that the member for Hinchinbrook does—this is about reneging on an agreement. It is about reneging on the spirit of an agreement for the sake of base politics. It is about playing cheap politics even though the government was prepared to sign an agreement with the federal government of this country. Even though it was prepared to sign an agreement with the federal government, it expects the federal government to put in the money. It expects the federal government to come up with the money. And what is it that the government wants from it? What is it that this government wants from this whole process? Cheap political points!

**Mr Mickel** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** It wants a headline, another photo opportunity and an opportunity to sell a message in urban electorates such as the one that is represented by the member for Logan, who likes to have such an input. It wants to sell a political message in those urban electorates that have nothing to do with and do not need to address the detail of the sugar industry. That is what it is all about, my honourable friend. It is all about selling a cheap political message to an audience that does not understand the detail. But in the areas where the detail is understood the cheap political message that has been conjured up for cheap political reasons by this false and misinforming government will be rejected out of hand, and so it has been in every sugar community in Queensland. This legislation has been rejected out of hand and it will continue to be rejected out of hand by the people who understand the detail of it.

The great tragedy is that so many people who will be taken in by this facade, this falsehood, that this government is perpetrating would prefer a situation where people in the sugar industry receive some genuine assistance from the state and federal governments to find a resolution to a problem that everybody agrees needs to be resolved. Everyone agrees that it needs to be resolved. That is the great tragedy of the approach that the Minister for Primary Industries takes to so many primary industries issues. The minister plays on the emotiveness, plays to an audience who wants to be supportive of assistance to people who undoubtedly need assistance to adjust and need assistance to overcome quite horrendous circumstances such as those that are created by drought conditions and so on through a number of issues.

There is community support for that and the Minister for Primary Industries and this government play on that community support, but the reality of the situation is that nothing is ever or very seldom delivered to the people who are involved in those particular situations. That will be the case with regard to the restructuring of the sugar industry. While the political rhetoric is there and all of the false sympathy is there when the Minister for Primary Industries is in front of the television cameras, he knows the falseness of that approach and he knows that in the end the people who are involved in the sugar industry will receive very little or nothing from this government, just as the people right across Queensland have received very little in terms of assistance from this government to assist them to survive the horrendous drought conditions. The drought has not produced too many benefits for too many people but it has provided some wonderful media opportunities for the Minister for Primary Industries, and he has absolutely made the best of them. I suspect that the government's approach to the restructuring of the sugar industry is along the same lines. It is all about maximising the media opportunities.

There is no doubt in my mind that there needs to be some change in the sugar industry to ensure that the Australian sugar industry can compete with those external forces such as the industry in Brazil, and all of those issues were outlined by the member for Hinchinbrook that are impacting on the sugar industry. There is no doubt that in common with a number of primary industries in Australia and in Queensland today there needs to be an adjustment and a modernisation of industries to allow people within those industries to be competitive and to survive in the economic environment in which they operate. But that is not automatically achieved by complete deregulation of any industry. That is the mistake that the economic gurus such as the member for Logan make when they stand up here and apply all the logic of a headless chook. There almost seems to be an assumption that total deregulation equals an automatic solution to all of those problems of competitiveness in a changing world environment. Not only does it not necessarily follow, there is no automatic benefit from deregulation. Evidence, if members like, the dairy industry.

**Mr Mickel** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** My friend, if you are going to interject at least do it so I can reply to you. Would you like an opportunity?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The member will come back to the bill.

**Mr SEENEY:** Evidence, if you like, the dairy industry and the effect of deregulation on the dairy industry. We heard the same arguments put in this place. I think the member for Logan read the same speech. In fact, I think most of it was cut and pasted from the speech that he made when we debated dairy deregulation in this parliament—the same tired, old rhetoric. And what happened? What was the final outcome of the deregulation of the dairy industry? Who benefited from the deregulation of the dairy industry? And who were the people who were most impacted? Who were most impacted by that deregulation at that time? And what good did it do? Did it achieve any of those fine-sounding aims that the member for Logan and so many other members on that side of the House were apt to repeat over and over again?

**Mr Palaszczyk** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** The Minister for Primary Industries can sit over there and interject, but the deregulation of the dairy industry should be something that bothers his conscience in his retirement. When he sits and reflects upon his career as Minister for Primary Industries in this place I hope that the deregulation of the dairy industry comes back to haunt him, because he knows the human toll that the deregulation of that industry has caused and he knows the impact that that has had on so many Queenslanders, so many Queensland families. And he could have done something about it. If there is one man in this place who could have done something about it, it is the Minister for Primary Industries.

**Mr Palaszczyk** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr SEENEY:** It is the Minister for Primary Industries.

**Mr Palaszczyk** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr SEENEY:** And now the chance with this legislation—

**Mr Palaszczyk** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Callide will firstly address the chair and not talk across the chamber and he will return to the bill, otherwise I will sit him down.

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was responding to the interjection from the minister. I am addressing the bill, with respect, with regard to the deregulation issue.

The bill before the House today gives the Minister for Primary Industries an opportunity to redeem himself for what happened with the deregulation of the dairy industry. We face the same situation as legislators—

**Mr Palaszczyk:** Tell us about the changes that we intend to introduce in the bill and tell us which ones you agree with. Come on!

**Mr SEENEY:** I am sure that when we get to the committee stage of the bill we will go through those in detail one after the other. I look forward to the contribution of the minister. However, I know that will not happen; the minister will stand up, as he always does, and read irrelevant briefing notes that sometimes do not even come close to the issue under discussion.

The point is that in the consideration of this legislation the minister and the government have a chance to do for the sugar industry what they failed to do for the dairy industry. I look forward to that happening. The problem with the deregulation or restructuring of any industry is the obvious angst and uncertainty caused to people in that industry. That is happening in the sugar industry today. There are always those who want to use the people in those industries for cheap political point scoring and their own political advancement. But the Labor government in Queensland is not the only one doing that in respect of the sugar industry. Regrettably, as was the case with the dairy industry, there are other fringe groups that want somehow to benefit their own cause from this disruption. This is one area in respect of which I do agree with the contribution made by the member for Logan in terms of the efforts of the federal member for Kennedy. I agree with the member for Logan; to use his words, Katter has been a coward in his approach to this issue. It is unfair and unjust to see people who have to grapple with this industry deregulation question being sold solutions that are just not possible. They are just not achievable and they are never going to be a viable solution for the industry or for any individual. But there are always political opportunists such as Katter who are prepared to go into those areas and promote these solutions that everybody who thinks about them sensibly knows are not achievable.

It is political cowardice on Katter's part to use the industry for his own cheap political purposes, but the same argument applies to the Beattie Labor government. The Beattie Labor government is just as cynically using the sugar industry for its own cheap political purposes with the introduction of this bill. The Beattie Labor government is trying to play wedge politics and put pressure on the federal government and break away from the spirit of the agreement that it entered into. That is what this legislation does. For that reason it should be rejected by this parliament. Quite apart from all of the technical reasons outlined by the member for Hinchinbrook, the member for Mirani and all of the other

speakers who have contributed to this debate have outlined why this bill is technically flawed. Apart from the fact that this bill is technically flawed, it is dishonest and is not within the spirit of the agreement entered into with the federal government and it should be rejected out of hand by the parliament this afternoon.