



Speech by

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 27 February 2003

DAIRY FARMERS

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (6.44 p.m.): On 21 February I had the opportunity, the privilege and also the sadness to attend a dairy crisis meeting in Biloela, which is adjacent to my electorate. The local member, Mr Jeff Seeney, offered his apologies as he was unable to attend. At that meeting the dairy industry was represented by hardworking, genuine family people. My experience is that dairying is one of those businesses that one chooses because they love the lifestyle and love the work, not because the hours are good. There are only a few dairies left in my electorate, but these people are dedicated morning and night. They are committed to their farms and their animals. It was stated at that meeting that since deregulation they had lost more producers than in the last decade. One of the speakers at the meeting said—and I think it was a very pertinent statement—that competition is for athletes, not farmers. They were talking in the context of competition between Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

Many of the decisions made in 1998 were made on the basis that we were going to be flooded by milk supplies from Victoria. As I was informed at that meeting and with other information that has been made available to me, Victorian farmers are hurting just as much as Queensland farmers. It was also stated that while we are exporting milk farmers will continue to go broke because the price of milk is driven by world parity. Dairy farmers are saying that we must now refocus on the domestic milk market and not be driven and controlled by world parity prices. Again, on the basis of the information that was presented to me, I would have to say that their perception is very real.

The AMPA, the Australian Milk Producers Association, and the Queensland Dairy Association continue to have conflicts. That is a shame, because both groups represent the genuine workers in our community—the dairy farmers in this instance. It would be wonderful to see the two groups get together, but the strength of feeling in both camps is so great—and I guess that the strength of feeling when families are going to the wall is so great—that the antagonism between those two groups is palpable. At the meeting it was agreed that there is a need for an immediate cash injection of funds to producers in the next six months. Because many areas of Queensland have had rain, it is expected that in the next two to three months, as cattle prices improve, dairy farmers—this is not cattle farmers—are going to disperse their herds through the meatworks just to get some return. The resolution passed at that meeting was that the federal government set up a royal commission into the widening gap between the cost of food to the consumer and the price at the farm gate. There were many hours of discussion about the situation that dairy farmers find themselves in and the opportunities to resolve their conflicts.

Time expired.