



Speech by

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CORAL REEF FISHERY QUOTAS; NATIONAL LIVESTOCK IDENTIFICATION SCHEME

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (11.57 a.m.): I want to speak about two important issues in primary industries and fisheries at the moment—the coral reef fishery quotas and the electronic national livestock identification scheme. The Beattie government introduced a coral reef fishery management plan which will wind back commercial catch levels from 4,800 tonnes to 3,061 tonnes. The minister confirmed that this plan leaves about 240 commercial fishermen with no licence to fish. The Queensland Seafood Industry Association estimates that these changes will cost the industry more than \$20 million and the loss of more than 500 jobs both in the catching and downstream processing sectors.

Earlier this month the minister introduced a backflip of sorts to address the fact that long-term commercial operators were being particularly hard hit by this management plan. These long-term operators will now be able to take up to 80 per cent of their pre-1997 commercial catch levels. Instead of raising the tonnage to fix this anomaly the minister is robbing Peter to pay Paul by taking quota off other fishermen who have already paid for their allocation.

Whilst it is important to address the concerns of long-term fishermen, the government's so-called solution seriously undermines our commercial fishing fleets' investment security. They have only just been given their individual transferable quota levels and started trading in the lead-up to the start of the new system on 1 July. Some fishermen have borrowed up to \$500,000 to increase their quota and ensure their economic viability. But now, five minutes later, the government is changing the rules and taking quota off people left, right and centre. How does it expect fishermen to operate with certainty? What message does this send to banks and fisheries management?

The Premier and State Development Minister have been crying crocodile tears about the future of the CRC reef centre. If the Beattie government is so supportive of the CRC reef centre, then surely the minister would change the management plan so that it was in line with new science produced by the CRC reef centre. This science shows that such a large reduction in the total catch is not biologically necessary and that the coral trout limits could be as much as 400 tonnes higher and the fishery would still be sustainable. The Beattie government dithered for six years before finally introducing a coral reef fin fishery management plan and still cannot get it right, with the goal posts still being shifted.

The other important issue at the moment is the electronic national livestock identification system. Rarely have we seen the promotion of such a scheme cause such division within the beef cattle industry. The beef cattle industry in Queensland is worth \$3 billion a year and is mainly an export oriented industry. The national livestock identification scheme has been mooted as an insurance scheme for Australia. I do not think that there are many people who would disagree with the need for us to be at the absolute forefront in whole-of-life traceback systems. As we market our beef overseas, we should be at the forefront in traceback and provide consumer confidence domestically and internationally. It is important that if a system is going to be forced upon producers and made mandatory that system should engender confidence in the industry, be cost-effective and be proven to actually work and not bring about huge costs and physical imposts on producers—whether they be small hobby farm producers who are confused about

what is happening or the big beef cattle producers with tens of thousands of head of cattle who are already, in many cases, electronically tagging and having significant problems in dealing with the EU market.

I have visited some of the saleyards of Queensland and talked to producers to get a balanced view representing different parts of the state. I have been amazed at some big producers who have the experience and the practical knowledge. Whilst they generally agree with the principle of having an effective system, they know that, if the branding system with proper crossbranding is effectively followed and the tail tagging system is followed properly, as it is, along with the NVD declarations, Queensland has one of the best systems in the world. They all say that no-one has asked for us to put in place the NLIS. If we want to do it to be at the forefront of the industry, well and good—provided that the system works.

Problems that can occur are loss of ear tags, and that will happen. That happens to somewhere between one per cent and three per cent—even up to five per cent and 10 per cent in some cases. The fact that an orange tag then has to replace the lost white tag will potentially mean the downgrading of the price at the saleyards through the processing plant. Horrendous problems will occur at some saleyards such as Gracemere, which had 5,000 or 7,000 head of cattle at a recent sale that I attended. In Roma, some 12,000 head of cattle have to be read in and read out and read into meatworks and so forth. There are going to be problems with producers who buy in cattle from other properties or transfer from property to property with the additional reading in and out that has to occur. There are some simple examples. If one simply breeds and sells the weaners off their place, they simply tag the weaners and that is all. This minister needs to recognise these problems and not implement this mandatory system until there is majority support in the beef cattle industry in Queensland.