



Speech by

Pat Purcell

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

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RURAL ADJUSTMENT AUTHORITY AMENDMENT BILL

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (3.48 p.m.): I rise to support the Rural Adjustment Authority Amendment Bill 2004. This authority's activities are directed to providing assistance to primary producers whose businesses show long-term viability. That has been stated over and over here today.

The authority may also provide assistance to enable small businesses dependent on primary production to survive in the event of a temporary downturn. We all know the devastating effect that the downturns in the wheat and wool industries have had on small towns. It has had a profound effect over a long period. To see businesses operating out there should be considered a great achievement and it is vitally important to keep our industries viable a long way into the future.

The Rural Adjustment Authority Act has not been reviewed since it was enacted in 1994. This act did not contain a requirement to do so, but in this day and age and with our government's policy that requires that legislation be reviewed at regular intervals we are revisiting it today. A review of this act was commenced in January 2003. The amendments today come out of that review. The review recommends—and it is quite obvious because of the time that has elapsed since 1994 and because of the many changes in technology—that the act be modernised. This will also enable it to comply with current legislative standards.

Briefly, the amendments will ensure that the act covers all relevant primary industries such as fisheries and forestry. The minister might be able to nod or shake his head, but coal is regarded in some areas as a primary industry. Would coal be covered by the rural adjustment act? He is not going to tell me. He might be able to tell me when he sums up the second reading debate. The amendments will also expand the functions of QRAA to include the administration of schemes for assistance for state and Commonwealth bodies on the approval of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries and expand the authority's ability to provide assistance to small businesses other than rural producers and other elements of the state's economy by removing limitations in the act. As I said previously, it is a great step forward. It recognises how important these small businesses are to our rural economies and our rural population in keeping them in the bush.

The amendments also note that the words 'in periods when they are experiencing temporary difficulty' have proven to be too restrictive and unworkable. The amendments also require approved assistance schemes to be made by regulation to ensure that they are drafted by Parliamentary Counsel and are tabled so we can make sure that people are given some certainty as to whether or not they will be assisted; empower the minister to give written directions to the board about the discharge of its functions; revise the composition of the board to ensure that members possess the skills required; empower the minister to require the board to give the minister stated information and reports; and provide appeal rights to unsuccessful applicants for assistance from QRAA.

People might not think that that is very important, but it is very important. I can remember the days when I had to buy molasses. I think there were five drums in two tonnes—molasses weighs pretty heavy—and we used to buy it from Bundaberg. Sometimes it had to be brought in because we did not have enough molasses in Australia for our own needs. It was usually bought at the railhead or at the shipping port and

then you had to pay the freight costs. Sometimes it was fairly hard to convince people that you should be getting the subsidy, so having an appeal mechanism in place if you get knocked back is a great idea. Finally, the amendments will provide for future reviews of the act on a regular basis. If you look at all of the changes, you can see that they are not only very necessary but also paramount to the survival of these industries. We must be on top of these to ensure not only viability but support for those in rural industries. It is very important for our economy. It is very important for our future generations. I support the bill.