




Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Tuesday, 10 July 2012

CAPRICORNIA CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

 **Mr BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (11.49 am): I rise to bring to the attention of the House and to the attention of Queenslanders, particularly those in Central Queensland, a shameful situation that has been confirmed by the minister here today—that is, this government's reckless razor approach to important jobs and programs in what it claims is an effort to save money. In the case of the low-security Capricornia Correctional Centre farm, which it has firmly in its sights, this government is determined to close a facility that has been successfully run for 40 years and, importantly, is a self-sustaining dairy. That move will have wide-ranging knock-on consequences for small businesses, prisoners and primary production in the region.

The prison dairy has been successfully operating since 1970. It has grown significantly to a point where it now produces almost one million litres of milk a year. It is staffed by a group of inmates who are supervised by three officers. The prisoners, as I am sure most members would understand, have reached a point in their sentences where they are entrusted to operate a prison business and, critically, learn skills and behaviours to equip them for their release. They look after a herd of 400 cattle and provide a significant lifeline to local stockfeed producers. In fact, it is estimated that the closure of the dairy would result in a 10 per cent drop in business for some local small business suppliers. In turn, the local milk cooperative, which over the decades has come to appreciate the Capricornia dairy and its significant contribution to its supplies—and I am informed the quality of that supply is excellent; first class—would similarly suffer an impact on its businesses. In Central Queensland dairies are shutting and this particular closure will be felt more severely due to those factors.

The narrow-minded, short-sighted and, it has to be said, absurdly misguided decision of this government to close the dairy sends several disturbing messages. Firstly, the government would look to any corner to unleash the razor gangs. Members opposite simply do not care who gets trampled in the process. In this case, it will be primary producers and primary production in Central Queensland, as well as other small businesses, that make up the backbone of the Central Queensland region. They do not care about jobs or small business, and that is a simple fact. What is worse, members opposite do not care about rehabilitation. Frequently, prisoners who are housed in low-security facilities and on prison farms are at the tail end of their sentences. The aim of a program such as the one that operates at the dairy is to prepare them for re-entry into society and instil in them a work ethic, which might be something unusual. This job initiative has been successful on both counts.

When a plan to scrap this dairy was first mooted two years ago, our side of politics recognised that it was important and that to close it down was potentially disastrous. Yes, we stopped it. Yes, the previous member, the Hon. Robert Swarten, championed that. Not so those on the opposite side, and the nonsense stated in the House this morning by the minister confirms that. Several questions need to be asked of the minister and he needs to provide the answers. Clearly, he is aware of the plan and supports it. Why would the minister close down a successful self-sustaining business that benefits not only those who work in it but also those who provide the goods to keep it running? Has he visited the site? Has he spoken about the impact on small businesses?

The word from people associated with the farm is that it is shutting because it does not turn a profit. We do not accept that smokescreen. Since when do we run rehabilitation and jail programs to make money? Is the minister happy that those benefiting from this working program—that is, prisoners, whom we have agreed to do everything in our power to rehabilitate—will be left with reduced options for their daily activities? This government would condemn them to idleness within the system and a much reduced chance of further rehabilitation. I understand that the average punter would have little idea that prisons run successful businesses; most of them would consider that prisons exist for punishment. However, they also exist to rehabilitate. To close this dairy would be a slap in the face for an important and fundamental responsibility.