




Speech By
Bruce Saunders

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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SUGAR INDUSTRY (REAL CHOICE IN MARKETING) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr SAUNDERS** (Maryborough—ALP) (8.38 pm): I rise to speak against this bill. We have heard a lot of waffle tonight. I would say that we have just heard from the king clown, but that would be an insult to the clowns. He forgot about Maryborough as a sugar-producing area.

Mr Bennett interjected.

Mr SAUNDERS: I take that interjection from the member for Burnett. Thank you very much. This bill will have a devastating effect on the Maryborough economy. My growers and my mill have a fantastic relationship.

Mrs Frecklington: Therefore, it does not affect you.

Mr SAUNDERS: I am sorry, but it will. This will have an effect on the money MSF will spend in my electorate. I refer to the committee hearing that was held on Monday, 31 August and a question asked by the member for Hervey Bay to Mr Mike Barry, Chief Executive Officer of MSF. Mr Sorensen asked—

Anyone can answer this. If this bill were passed and made law, how would that affect your operations at the Maryborough sugar mill and right across-the-board as well? How would it affect your operations?

Mr Barry, the Chief Executive Officer of MSF, said—

There are a couple of material issues with the bill. One is that it does transfer title of the end product. I heard the commentary earlier about ex-appropriation, which is exactly right. So today by law MSF Sugar has the right to market 100 per cent of the sugar that we produce. That is a right. If the bill goes through, that right will be taken away from us. That is a material issue. It will affect our balance sheet. It has a lot of knock-on effects, so that is a major issue.

Mr Barry went on to talk about the effect that this bill would have on the Maryborough economy. The company is a great company. It is a very good corporate citizen, but those opposite are asking how a Labor man can stand up and protect a company. I will say this on the record: it is a very good corporate citizen. It employs 122 people directly and about 680 are indirectly employed in Maryborough city through MSF Sugar. This bill will limit the money that MSF Sugar will put back into the Maryborough community. In fact, it will become a toll manufacturer as Mr Barry said to me. It has spent an absolute fortune in Maryborough standards in terms of the money it has put into the community of Maryborough together with Pivot in terms of looking after farmers and it has a great relationship with its growers. Jeff Atkinson is the head of the Maryborough Canegrowers association. I have met Jeff and we have a great relationship.

An honourable member: You two are mates, though.

Mr SAUNDERS: Of course we are. Jeff said this in answer to a question during the committee hearing—

Yes. We have had differences at times, but we have always managed to sort it out without arbitration. Maybe in our area it is not a problem while maybe up north it could be a different issue, but certainly in our area we have been able to work through it and come up with a solution.

Why can we not do that for the rest of Queensland? Why do we have to go backwards? These companies have put a lot of money into my city and yet those opposite want to make it a toll manufacturer when Mike Barry has said that that will dry up the money. That money will be dried up if this bill passes. Yesterday it was glowing in here when we were talking about biofuels and ethanol. I have a commitment from MSF that it will move down this track. If this bill is passed, this commitment is finished. There is a commitment from the company that we will get cogeneration, a particleboard plant and biofuels in Maryborough. It may come as a shock to members on the other side, but they left Maryborough in a hole—an absolute hole.

A government member: Abandoned it.

Mr Rickuss: You only got 75 per cent of the vote!

Mr SAUNDERS: It was enough to win the seat because I am on this side of the chamber. Let me tell you: 62 per cent of the shops were vacant in my CBD. We came to power nine months ago and that is now down to 22 per cent. I have worked hard as the local member with canegrowers and with the mill to get unallocated state land for the mill to advance the mill and produce more cane to take it up over the benchmark 1.2 million tonnes to make the mill viable. We have worked very hard. This bill jeopardises that.

Those opposite are not happy with flogging us to death when in government; now they have to flog us to death when in opposition. Fair go. I do not know what the people of Maryborough have done to the LNP—I do not know what they have done—but those opposite talk about our members not going up to see them. We have not seen any LNP people—straight through like Flash Gordon, gone! Those opposite should come up and talk to the people of Maryborough and tell them that they are going to kill off the sugar industry. They talk about us not going anywhere. I am inviting those opposite to come up and talk to the growers and talk to the millers, because this bill is going to have devastating effects.

We have heard the members for Mount Isa, Dalrymple and everyone else talk about how passionate they are for their city. There is no-one more passionate than I am for Maryborough city and I will never forgive. If this bill passes tonight, I will never forgive any of them. We heard the opposition leader and member for Southern Downs say that the sun will rise tomorrow and it is going to be great. I tell members what: if this bill passes tonight there will be dark clouds over Maryborough city.

Mr Bennett interjected.

Mr SAUNDERS: Member for Burnett, thank you very much.

Mr Bennett interjected.

Mr SAUNDERS: Thug? You should just go and look after your men's shed and forget about everything else!

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SAUNDERS: What can I say? I want to put this on the record: here we are discussing the future of one of the oldest cities in Queensland—Maryborough city—and those opposite are a bunch of clowns. No, I apologise to the clowns association. We have a bunch of clowns over there and I have been called a thug by the member for Burnett. I would like him to withdraw that. I would like a withdrawal. He has just called me a thug.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! The standing orders are quite clear. If a member finds a statement personally offensive, then they can ask for it to be withdrawn. Member for Burnett?

Mr BENNETT: In the interests of this debate, given that it is really serious, I do withdraw and hopefully the debate can continue in a dignified manner which you might be able to leave—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burnett, I will have an unconditional withdrawal.

Mr BENNETT: I withdraw.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lockyer, you have been warned a number of times by the Speaker today. I will be taking close note of your interjections. I now call the member for Maryborough.

Mr SAUNDERS: As I said, in such an important debate as this when we are talking about the absolute future of Maryborough city—one of the oldest cities and cane-growing areas in Queensland—we degenerate into that sort of thing. I cannot support this bill. During my election campaign I vowed to put Maryborough first, and I will always put Maryborough first. This bill does not put Maryborough first. It does not put my canegrowers first. It does not put the manufacturer, Maryborough Sugar Factory, first. It puts in jeopardy the money that will be invested in the City of Maryborough by MSF. This bill puts that in jeopardy.

I am honestly very disappointed that I am standing here tonight debating this bill because the opposition always talks about how it is for industry and how it is promoting jobs and how we do not have a plan. We have a great plan for MSF in Maryborough and a great plan with the growers, but unfortunately it does hurt me to stand here tonight and say that if this bill passes I fear for the sugar mill in my city. I absolutely fear for it. As the local member, one thing I should never have to worry about is that mill closing down. It is a heavy burden to stand here tonight and oppose this bill.