



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 1) 2002-03

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Wednesday, 19 June 2002

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (4.05 pm)—It is quite incredible that in this budget the money allocated for agriculture has been reduced, and it is most certainly a reflection upon the minister, who obviously has no clout in cabinet. At the time of making this address to the Main Committee, the tobacco industry looks like it has completely vanished in Queensland. The forestry industry in North Queensland has all but vanished. The fishing industry has all but gone. The egg-farming industry has all but gone. Dairying has been seriously damaged. The grape industry has all but gone. The sugar industry has a huge question mark over it. As a result of the tardiness of the minister in acting in the matter, which was referred to very well by the previous speaker, the minister has created a great deal of uncertainty in the cattle industry.

It was a government decision that destroyed the tobacco industry. It was a government decision that destroyed the forestry industry. It was a government decision that destroyed the fishing industry. It was a government decision that destroyed the egg-farming industry. Dairying has been damaged by a government decision, and the grape industry has been destroyed by a government decision. The cattle industry is in trouble now, and I suppose about 30 per cent of the problem specifically must be sheeted home to the minister because of his tardiness in taking any action or showing any leadership whatsoever in the industry. I think that the ultimate quota decision has probably been a good one—that is a very difficult call to make—but, if the decision had been made back in February or March, all of this uncertainty would have been over in March or April and we would not have it accumulating now, at the most precarious time, as the American beef quota starts to run out over the next two or three months.

The talk about free trade rescuing Australia is just so ridiculous that it bears nothing but the scorn of every single member of parliament in this place. I do not intend any disrespect of the Prime Minister—I think he genuinely tries hard in this matter—but he has been extremely poorly briefed. You can get details of the Keating discussions with the US Secretary of State saying exactly the same thing 16 years ago. For 16 years this has been going on. What this government is asking—and what governments for the last 16 years have been asking, ever since Mr Keating's stupidity—is that the United States get in step with Australia. What an absolutely preposterous and ridiculous proposition to put before the people of Australia and the people of the world—that Europe should get in step with Australia! Europe probably has four or five capital cities that have a bigger population than does Australia. Most certainly Los Angeles has a bigger population than does Australia. And we are seriously saying that these people should get in step with us! What ridiculous rubbish.

No, it is about time that the government of Australia got in step with the rest of the world. Read the OECD document and you will find out that the rest of the world have a 60 per cent support level for their farmers, and do not go around condemning, as the current agricultural minister does, the United States government. He used the word 'betrayal' to the United States government—a government that has given us nearly 400,000 tonnes when Europe has cut us from 700,000 tonnes to about 5,000 tonnes. And he goes casting aspersions on them! What for? Because they are looking after their farmers. Isn't that a terrible indictment of them! Isn't it a terrible shame and a disgrace that the government of America should be looking after their farmers!

It would be very good if these people put their energies into looking after our farmers; that is, it would be good if they looked after our farmers in exactly the same way as the American and European governments look after their farmers—in fact, in exactly the same way as every other government on earth looks after its farmers. If we do not do that the future for these industries is grim beyond belief. I probably represent the cattle industry more than does any other person in this place. If the cattle industry is in trouble at present, I deeply regret the tardiness of the minister in making a decision on this matter. However, now that the decision has been made by the minister, I must say that it has been a very difficult decision to make and that the decision is, in my opinion, a good one.