



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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Date Wednesday, 19 June 2002
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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

Source House
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Responder
Question No.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (4.36 pm)—In defending the government's decision on the beef quotas into the United States I will say that my family owned a clothing store in Cloncurry for the best part of 100 years, and we spent a lot of time developing markets onto the big cattle stations in the Gulf country. We built up relationships: we made arrangements for agency fees, looked after stockmen when they came down to town—put them up overnight in some cases—and did numerous other things, such as looking after their entry forms for the local rodeo. But if a government were to come along and say, 'Nicky Powers up the road has had a bit of a rough time, so we are going to, by law, take some of this market off you and hand it over to him,' I think that that would be very unfair. Whilst it is not quite as simple as I am making it out to be, in answer to the criticisms I must say that I cannot see how a government can justify itself by coming in and taking away a market and relationships which have been developed over decades between the traditional sellers into the United States market. People made a decision to go into the prime beef market in Japan and that, albeit through no fault of their own, has proved a very bad decision, but the government cannot redress every bad commercial decision that has been made, even though the people may be entirely innocent.

Having said all of those things, it is highly desirable that we keep open every single meatworks if that is humanly possible. Concessions have been made in the new rules which have taken market away from some of the meatworks that operate in the area that I represent. I suppose that it can be said that, coming from a grinding beef market area, I would have prejudices along the lines of the current arrangements, but I think the overall picture here is that the government did not have much alternative but to make the decision that they made, and I do not doubt for a moment that that will stick. As for assistance to some of the meatworks that will be placed in trouble, not as a result of the decision by the government but by the decision of Japanese consumers who are not now buying beef that they were buying previously, if there are solutions to those problems such as extra advertising into the Japanese market or labelling which indicates that beef is Australian beef and not Japanese beef, I think that those things are issues that could be addressed and could be very helpful to some of the people who are quite understandably unhappy over the arrangements. But I would strongly urge the government to maintain the current situation. The decision has been a good one. However, once again I reiterate my criticism that it was made far too late and has left very grave uncertainty, particularly as we are running towards the end of the market year for Australia.