



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**COMMITTEES**

**Rural and Regional Affairs and  
Transport References Committee**

**Report**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 14 September 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 14 September 2009  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Nash, Sen Fiona

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator NASH** (New South Wales) (4.59 pm)—I present the report of the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on the fee rebate for the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service export certification functions, together with the *Hansard* recording of proceedings and documents presented to the committee.

Ordered that the report be printed.

**Senator NASH**—by leave—I move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

Certainly there is a very strong view across the committee that reform across the AQIS export certification functions is necessary. I think it is very important to make the point that, in terms of the reforms themselves, there was very strong support. However, the separate issue of removing the 40 per cent rebate for the industry is a different matter entirely, and it became very clear to the committee that the measure had taken a lot of the sectors of the industry by surprise. It obviously came out of the bill review, but it was very clear to the committee members throughout the inquiry that there was an expectation that the 40 per cent rebate would remain. We felt the very obvious nature of the government tying the delivery of the reform to government acceptance of removal of the 40 per cent rebate was not in the best interests of the industry. The obvious increase in charges for the industry as a result of the 40 per cent rebate being taken away meant that there were going to be some significant challenges right across the sectors. I think that came through clearly to the committee, particularly from the smaller parts of the industry—the sectors that have the least ability, if you like, to deal with a sudden increase in the charges. Interestingly, the red meat industry, which is responsible for 70 per cent of agricultural exports, was not asked for its opinion of the removal of the 40 per cent rebate throughout the bill review process. We thought that was indicative of the lack of effective consultation with many parts of the industry.

I move now to the issue of 100 per cent cost recovery. There was significant commentary to the committee about the very strong belief that there was a legitimate cost to government in lot of this business and that 100 per cent of the cost should not come back on to the industry itself. The point was made that many countries around the world see this activity as being for the public good and that in Australia we should be looking at it on the same basis. It clearly came through that the increased cost is certainly going to go to the heart of the competitiveness of lot of our industries, particularly with the smaller operators. We heard a very high degree of concern about the impact of jobs losses, particularly in regional areas; indeed, some industry sectors believed that they would disappear altogether.

We have recommended that the Senate move to disallow the removal of the 40 per cent rebate. We believe that the industry should have the benefit of that 40 per cent rebate remaining. Having said that, we are very supportive of the reform process; there is no doubt about that. We are very concerned that the government has chosen to tie, if you like, the forward progress of the reforms to industry accepting the removal of the 40 per cent rebate. We do not believe that is in the best interests of the industry, and I know that some of my colleagues in the chamber will make some further remarks about that.

I would particularly like to thank the secretariat, as a very tight time frame was involved with the turnaround of the report from this inquiry. I place on record the committee's very sincere appreciation for the work that the secretariat did in preparing the report.