



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

**Korea-Australia Free Trade Agreement**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 11 February 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

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**Page** 77  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Nash, Sen Fiona

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**Senator NASH** (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (17:36): I rise to make a few brief comments following the tabling of the statement from Minister Robb. In relation to trade—and I speak as a farmer as much as a minister in this building—there is absolutely no doubt that we have some of the most efficient farmers in the world. I know that Senator McKenzie would back me up on this. Farmers in her state of Victoria and, indeed, right around the country, are continually showing their efficiency, their resilience and their ability to innovate and move forward with the times. I say that notwithstanding the very, very difficult circumstances we are seeing now in terms of the drought that has taken such a significant hold over so many parts of our farming areas across the nation. But one of the things we realise as farmers in this country is that we are an exporting nation. Because, as farmers, we do not have the population they do in the United States, where they are very much a nation of consumption of their agricultural commodities, we have to export, and we recognise that. So we do understand that we need to put in place trading arrangements with other nations that are going to facilitate our agricultural communities and our agricultural businesses.

I certainly do take note of the previous speaker's contribution that the FTA is not in the national interest. I can tell you that the agricultural sector which stands to gain significantly from this free trade agreement does believe it is in the national interest. I will put on record some of those things. The 40 per cent tariff on beef will be eliminated over 15 years, not 18 years, because it was this country that pushed for the same deal as the United States. The 22½ per cent tariff on lamb and sheep meat will go. Tariffs on dairy products ranging from 36 to 176 per cent will be eliminated. And the three per cent tariff on sugar, in a market currently were worth nearly \$500 million to Australia, will be eliminated as soon as the FTA comes into effect. The tariffs on wheat, seafood items, wine, chocolate, beer, a range of horticulture, pharmaceuticals, canned fruit—and the list goes on—will all go.

Now, I take it that there are some views around the FTA that may well be somewhat different in nature, as we have seen from the contributions in the chamber. But, if we are going to look to the future, and if we are going to look at where we want agriculture in this nation to be in 30 and 40 and 50 years' time, how do we put in place an environment that allows our farmers to prosper and to be sustainable? We have to look at our trading arrangements with other nations around the world, and that includes putting in place free trade agreements where they are appropriate and where they are of benefit to our agricultural producers. Somebody who does know this probably as well as anybody in the building is my colleague Senator Back, whom I have spent many an hour with on the Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport—which, sadly, I am no longer part of—looking at precisely these types of issues. If we are going to have sustainable farming into the future then we need to have a long-term vision. It is this side of the chamber, it is this coalition government, that has a long-term vision for agriculture in this nation.

Unfortunately, under the previous government we saw very much a disconnect between the government and the agricultural sector in what was needed in terms of that agricultural sector going forward. We need look no further than the live-export debacle, when we saw the knee-jerk reaction from the previous Labor government in banning live exports. That is a singular, most devastating decision for our agricultural farm-producing sector. It was just appalling. We have the opportunity now, with a coalition government, to finally have some long-term vision in where we want to place our agricultural sector in the world and in what decisions need to be made to make that agricultural sector sustainable. In light of that, we actually understand that that forward-thinking needs to contain agreements with other nations around the world that are going to provide that sustainability and that opportunity of access and that return to our farm sector that they so desperately need.

I commend the minister, Mr Robb, for the work that he has done and I also commend the supporting work from others in the coalition that I am sure was behind that to make sure that we have the best trading environment in place for our farmers, who deserve the recognition of this government for what they do for this economy and this nation. For too long our agricultural sector has been ignored. It is about time that they were given the recognition that they deserve for the contribution that they make not only to the social fabric of this nation but to the economy

as a whole. It is generation of real wealth. So we, as a government, need to take all the decisions we can to provide them with some sustainability. The agreement around the Korean FTA is certainly an example of that.

Question agreed to.