



## Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

**The Hon. TONY CATANZARITI** [6.02 p.m.] (Inaugural speech): I support the bill. As I rise for the first time to address this Parliament, the Mother Parliament of Australia, I want to acknowledge that we are on the land of the Eora people, who lived on, loved and cared for the country for at least 50,000 years.

I am from rural Australia, and proud to have been elected to represent particularly the people who live in rural New South Wales. I see this as a time of crisis for the countryside, not only because of the worst drought in a generation, but also because of the rift between the city and the bush. I am from an area that is often called the food bowl of the nation. But for many city dwellers it may as well not exist, and if they do hear of the area it is only about problems such as salinity, which thankfully has been controlled in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA).

The great divide in Australia today is no longer about ethnicity and race—multiculturalism has largely seen to that—nor even religion, which was one of the biggest divides of the past between the Catholics and the Protestants, but about town and country, city and the bush. I recognise that there are elements in our society that would like to reintroduce the religious divide by sowing the seeds of bigotry on a religious basis. It's time—to coin a phrase—that the facts are generally known about our rural industries. The first is that the Australian farmer is, in many cases, the most productive per man and per hectare in the world. I will give an example of the rice industry a little later on. Yet, compared with the farmers in Europe, the United States of America and Japan, the Australian farmer receives less government support than anyone. In fact, in some cases, it seems as if our Federal Government, particularly, treats farmers as parasites. Later I will give an example of our citrus exports to the United States of America.

Contributing to the great divide in Sydney and the bush is the shameful manipulation of the prices of basic food items. Struggling families in the city must think farmers are among the rich and price exploitative in the world. In fact, overseas controlled supermarkets and other retail outlets dictate the price paid by the housewife, and not the farmer. It is the farmer and the city housewife who are exploited together. Let me give some examples. On average, the Australian farmer receives between 30¢ and 40¢ per kilo for vegetables such as onions, carrots and potatoes. The farmer has to recover from this price the cost of growing, producing, packing and transporting vegetables to market. Yet these vegetables are often sold in supermarkets for around \$3 to \$4 per kilo. That is a mark-up of about 1,000 per cent.

Similarly, Australian farmers receive around 18¢ per kilo for navel oranges, which is obviously still not cheap enough for the supermarkets, as they continue to import oranges from the United States that retail for around \$8 per kilo. The only winners in this are the multinational corporations who own the supermarkets, and the real losers are the farmers and the consumers who are both being exploited by the highly inflated prices. I want to see a new deal for the farmer and the consumer. I say, let the discussions begin to end the unjust and negative stereotyping of our farmers, and the price whipping of city families for basic food items.

The Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area is the most successful and productive irrigation area in the world. The first recorded outsider to see what is now the MIA was John Oxley, in 1817. Standing on top of Mount Binga he described the area as "a howling wilderness with no human, animal or bird life. I am the first white man to see it and I will be the last". He might have been a great explorer, but he was a rotten prophet. The MIA has become the most productive food-producing area in Australia. Australian rice growers are the most efficient in the world. They produce the highest field yields in the world. It is projected that the medium grain average yield in the MIA in 2003 will be around 11 tonnes per hectare. This compares to the world average rice yield, which is less than four tonnes per hectare.

The farmers over the years have proved that their farming techniques have had a positive impact on water conservation. The Australian rice farmers use 50 per cent less water to grow one kilogram of rice than the world average, and their water use efficiency is the highest in the world. This water use efficiency will continue to improve as Australian rice farmers are committed to research and development, and the launch of a new medium grain variety released in 2003 called Quest, which will use 10 per cent less water than the variety Amaroo. The rice industry has strict regulations that ensure the highest growing standards are used with minimal environmental impact. This ensures environmental sustainability of the industry.

Each year Australian rice growers produce around 1.2 million tonnes. There are around 2,500 family farms that produce the crop and these farmers are the owners of the rice milling and marketing business known as SunRice. SunRice is arguably Australia's most successful, vertically integrated agribusiness, manufacturing and marketing an extensive range of table rice and value-added rice food products in over 70 markets around the world and in Australia. The sales revenue for 2002 showed that SunRice generated \$820 million, but as SunRice exports

around 85 per cent of its production—the majority as branded consumer packs—the income generated from its export revenue has been \$450 million. SunRice is now Australia's largest exporter of branded food products. The rice industry, through SunRice, generates employment in regional and metropolitan areas and helps secure the viability of significant regional communities. The rice industry activities support 63 regional towns, mainly in south-western New South Wales. Studies have shown that the rice industry generates 20 per cent of regional income and 18 per cent of regional employment in the Riverina Plains statistical district.

The MIA is also very fortunate to have the Barter family, who are based in Griffith and operate a high-quality chicken meat industry, an industry that employs some 1,500 people in the area, most of whom are unskilled labour. It should be noted that this family business has undertaken the in-house training of its dedicated staff, a large contribution to the almost zero unemployment percentage in the Griffith area. In fact, Barters has on its books 30 to 40 vacancies at any given time of the year. Having recently purchased the Steggles company, it now employs some 4,500 workers Australiawide.

The size of citrus plantings in the Riverina is approximately 9,000 hectares or 22,500 acres. At any one time it is expected that 83 per cent of these will be in production. Approximately 20 per cent of the Riverina's citrus fruit is exported. However, recent statistics about juice imports provided by the Productivity Commission in 1990-91 showed that Australia imported 112,000 tonnes, fresh fruit equivalent, of frozen concentrate orange juice [FCOJ]. Since then, however, a number of factors—including reduced tariffs on FCOJ imports, removal of the Australian content sales tax concession and strong competition from Brazil—have resulted in an increase in the share of low-cost, high-quality imported FCOJ being sold in the Australian market. FCOJ imports increased by 351 per cent between 1990-91 and 2000-01, at an average annual rate of 16 per cent to around 506,000 tonnes of fresh fruit equivalent.

Again, figures sourced from the Productivity Commission report show that the gross value of citrus in Australia is \$426.1 million. This is broken up as follows: the Riverina produces 30 per cent of Australian citrus, equivalent to \$137.1 million; other parts of New South Wales, 4 per cent and \$5.7 million; South Australia, 25 per cent and \$21.3 million; Victoria, 19 per cent and \$81.3 million; Queensland, 20 per cent and \$86 million; and Western Australia, 2 per cent and \$6.5 million.

The MIA is home to some of the largest family owned and managed wineries within Australia: McWilliams Wines, De Bortoli Wines, Riverina Estate, Westend Wines, Miranda Wines and Casella Wines. The wine industry in the Riverina MIA is the largest wine grape producing region within New South Wales. It encompasses an area greater than 16,000 hectares capable of producing 230,000 tonnes of quality wine grapes. The region produces 65 per cent of all wine grapes grown within New South Wales and 15 per cent of the national crush. In 2002 a record 230,000 tonnes were produced with a value of \$107 million at the farm gate.

The region supports 520 wine grape growing businesses operating over 750 vineyards. The region's value of wine produced is approximately \$500 million, producing 200 million litres at approximately \$2.50 per litre. Exports now account for approximately 50 per cent of all wine produced. The Riverina is home to Australia's highest performing export winery, Casella Wines, makers of Yellow Tail, which is sold in the United States of America. In comparison to other wine-producing regions—with 400,000 tonnes in the Murray Valley, Victoria and 500,000 tonnes in the Riverland, South Australia—the MIA produces more tonnes in its geographical area than any other region of Australia.

Also, 27 per cent of all Riverina growers have implemented a high-technology drip irrigation watering system. I have briefly outlined some of the industry and development areas of the MIA in the last 60 years, but before all this development the Wiradjuri people cared for the area for more than 50,000 years. They continue to live and flourish in the area, setting an example of co-operative developments, which in my lifetime have seen an improvement in every aspect of the community. The new people who came as settlers and have been involved in the massive economic development of the region migrated from every continent, and my own family formed part of the 60 per cent of the Griffith population who are from Italian origin.

I am a proud Australian and I have a proud Italian heritage. I shall now give honourable members a short personal background. I was born in Plati Reggio, Calabria, in southern Italy in September 1949 to Michele and Rosa Catanzariti. My father left Italy for Australia in late 1949 with the hope of finding a better land that would offer work and stability so that he could bring up his family. He first went to Adelaide, where an uncle put him up and gave him some work growing vegetables. Because of the lack of work he later moved to Griffith, and commenced working with the Water Irrigation Commission, now known as Murrumbidgee Irrigation—and I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of the Chairman of Murrumbidgee Irrigation, Mr Dick Thompson—building channels and bridges from Griffith to Hay for delivery of water to the farming communities and their properties.

They camped in primitive conditions of four poles covered with a tin roof, hessian bags for walls and a dirt floor. Although on many occasions my father was tempted to return to Italy, he soldiered on and wrote to his wife to make arrangements to come and join him in Australia. She did this and when I was just one year old we left Italy and arrived in Griffith in September 1950. We took up residence in a small home in the village of Beelbanger. In 1956 my parents purchased a 25-acre mixed fruit farm at Yoogali. Unfortunately, that same year the floods came

and all the fruit trees died. The entire 25 acres had to be removed and replanted. My father had to keep working at his day job and did most of the farming on weekends. The whole family, young and old, which now included my sister, all worked to help develop and replant the farm. To protect the property against future flooding we installed a tile drainage system.

I attended and was educated at the Yoogali Public School and later at St Marys, leaving at the age of 15 to help on the family farm in the fruit season and working at whatever was available in the off-season. I did almost everything from picking figs and washing carrots to working as a baker's assistant, petrol station attendant, carpet layer, timber yardman and barman at the local leagues club. Incidentally, the carrot work was for the Piccoli family and one of the partners' sons, Adrian, is a serving member of the other place.

In 1970 I married Mary Musolino from Griffith and commenced working for Griffith Producers, a large fruit and vegetable growers co-operative buying, packing, and selling all fruit and vegetables for the domestic and export markets. In the great dry areas surrounding the MIA other families have developed the grain and livestock industries, which are second to none. In 1975 my wife and I purchased our first citrus property at Lake Wyangan, a village five kilometres outside of Griffith. Again, in 1990 the citrus industry was in a downward trend, resulting from the imports of juice from Brazil, so I was forced to take another job just so I could hold on to the farm.

I was appointed the Export Manager for Filmont Australia, which was set up by 10 local growers and packers to take on the Japanese market with our navel orange crop. We found that this was one of the most difficult markets to take on because of its protocols, but it has been very rewarding. This position gave me a greater understanding of marketing in the real world as we took on markets such as Russia, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Canada and the United States of America. We were astonished to find that our own Australian Government had legislated, through a corporate commission, to allow citrus to be exported into the United States of America through one single importer, DNE. This meant that the export of fruit from Australia into the United States other than through DNE would be a criminal offence to be dealt with by law, and DNE would only accept fruit on consignment, which left growers and exporters at the mercy of the importer. It is difficult that in the year 2003 this is still the law for citrus that is exported to America from Australia. I call on the Australian Government to revisit this issue with the view to righting this wrong for all the citrus growers of Australia and to give them the freedom to choose their own destiny.

I am very proud to be a farmer and a representative of the Australian Labor Party, which has contributed so much to Australian closer settlement, which, of course, is the creation of family farms. Out of the great diversity has been born a unity that has seen Griffith and the MIA, including the great sister towns of Narrandera, Leeton, Yanco and Whitton—the birthplace of another new member of this Parliament, Linda Burney, who is also present—being hailed as the birthplace of multiculturalism. The year 2003 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the inauguration of multiculturalism under the Whitlam Government. It is a system and philosophy that has put Australia in the forefront of the world in the development of unity out of diversity.

My first involvement in a political campaign was to work with my friends and comrades to have Al Grassby elected to this Parliament in 1965. He went on to be the member for Riverina and a Minister of the Whitlam Government, inaugurating the policy of multiculturalism in 1973. He was the first Labor member for Riverina for 30 years. In the New South Wales Parliament, my illustrious Labor predecessors include George Enticknap, who served Murrumbidgee for 27 years; Lin Gordon of Leeton, who became Minister for Lands and Water Conservation; Paddy Grace of Yanco, who was elected to this House; and Herb MacPherson of Wagga Wagga, who provided a Labor voice in the Parliament for a lifetime. Jack Hallam of Griffith also served in this House and became Minister for Agriculture, and Frank Sartor, Minister for Science and Medical Research, was also born in Griffith.

In conclusion, I want to say that my own debut in this House would not have been possible without the support of my wife, Mary, who has always been there for me and for the campaigns that I have been involved in for so many years. This moment is as much for Mary and my children as it is for me. My son Michael, and his wife Belinda and my precious grand-daughter Isabella, my son Sam, and his wife Nancy, my son Roy and my daughter Rosemary, and her husband Mark, have been loyal supporters in every way, be it in the home or on the farm. To my parents, my sister, Teresa, and brother, Roy, thank you for your help and support.

If it had not been for the Hon. Al Grassby I may never have been involved in politics. His advice and support have been a great inspiration to me. To the members of the Griffith branch of the ALP, a great big thank you for all the support and efforts over many years to have me elected to this House. Particular thanks go to Les and Joan Spence, and Ron Anson, who have been there for me and the Labor Party, and who never gave up hope in making sure this election victory became a reality.

I would like to make special mention of Joe Burns, Mick Beckwith, Shirley Hocking, Domenic Sergi, Domenic Maddafari, Alma Dufty, Wilma and Barney Burke, and Peggy Delves. I pay tribute to Premier Bob Carr, who not only won the March election but also won it so convincingly that I am the first member of the Legislative Council to be elected from the position of number 10 on the Legislative Council ticket. Tony Kelly, MLC, and now Minister for Rural Affairs, Minister for Local Government, and Minister for Emergency Services has always encouraged and supported me. I give my heartfelt thanks to Eric Roozendaal, the General Secretary of the ALP, and his able

assistant, Mark Arbib, for giving me the opportunity to fulfil my ambition.

Finally, as a member of Country Labor and as a member of this House I will do my utmost to ensure that rural communities, particularly farmers, are kept viable. If they are not viable our young will walk away from the land, leaving all the experience that has been passed down from father to son over many generations. This will create a terrible social and economic loss to this great country and future generations will be forced to go to the textbooks to learn how to grow a bag of spuds—at great expense to the whole community. I thank each and every one very much.

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