



House of Assembly

Extract from Hansard

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Australian Year of the Farmer

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (12:33): Mr Acting Speaker, I would just like to speak briefly on this matter. My electorate of Light has a number of farmers; not only farmers in terms of crops, etc. (such as wheat farmers), but there is also horticulture and viticulture throughout the electorate.

First of all, I would like to make a couple of comments about the area close to where I live, and the history of some of the farming communities where I live. We arrived in the area in the early 1960s, and farming in the sixties to today has changed dramatically. I would like to pay particular tribute, in part of the celebration of farming, to some of the communities which have come and gone through the electorate.

In the early 1960s and 1970s the community where I live had a lot of

people of Greek and Italian background and the farmers, who had obviously come from overseas, along with people from other nationalities as well, predominantly worked in glasshouses, as market gardeners, or chicken farmers. They were quite small farms, but they were able to make a reasonable farm income to raise their families. That has changed over time. I can recall a dairy farmer down the road who used to have a horse and cart—this was in my lifetime. He would go down the road and drop off milk.

The Hon. A. Koutsantonis interjecting:

Mr PICCOLO: There you go. More recently people from Vietnam and other countries of Southern Asia have come to live in the area, and they bring with them, as did the early migrants, a whole range of techniques they used in their country of birth and have tried to adapt them to Australian situations. In the main they have been very successful, predominantly for two reasons: first, they work very hard. If anybody has worked in a glasshouse—and I only do it once a year when I have to pick tomatoes for my mum—they will know it is very hard work. Secondly, they work together as families. That is one thing that is very common in rural and regional Australia, whether one is of European or Anglo background. Those rural communities have succeeded because they work as a family unit.

I also mention the important role played by women in farming communities. I agree in part with what was said earlier when we talked about women in the workforce. Women have

been in the workforce since the year dot. In terms of the farming community, they have made major contributions to farming. They have not only done the work on the farms but also often had the role of raising families as well, so their life has been particularly difficult. I also pay tribute to the women: whether they have worked supporting market gardeners or farmers of different types, they have made a major contribution to our communities.

The other thing I would like to mention is that farming has changed. A lot of those small farms have now disappeared. Farming productivity and efficiency has improved out of sight. Some of the most efficient farming in the world occurs in this country and this state, which helps ensure we have food security not only for our own nation but for people around the world.

One of the areas that has obviously changed dramatically is in the area of intensive farming with the changes in animal welfare law. One of the challenges farmers are facing is how to meet the increasing challenges faced by consumer and other groups' expectations about the ethical treatment of animals, and that is an area into which farmers are moving. It is interesting as I have a pig farmer in my electorate who I am working with at the moment, and he is now looking at changing his whole farm to being environmentally sustainable farming. That is good for the environment and also much more friendly for the animals. The old days of pigs being raised in closed sheds are

disappearing. So, we have a number of benefits.

Farmers are adapting. We have to be mindful that they cannot adapt overnight, and people need resources and time to do that. I get a little annoyed at times with some of the lobby groups who want change now. A lot of the farming community are happy to change, but they just need time as it is not a cheap process to do that—it is very expensive.

My next point is that a lot of farming is very marginal because of the lack of competition. Whether you are a vegetable farmer, growing grapes, fruit or wheat, with the limited number of people who retail, wholesale or purchase a product, the lack of competition particularly in retailing is putting the squeeze on a lot of farmers. Something about which we need to be very mindful in this place is that competition delivers benefits, but the lack of competition or perceived competition (and I am talking Coles and Woolworths, etc.) can distort the market significantly where we could literally wipe out our small producers. We need to be mindful of that.

With those few comments, again, I would like to pay tribute to all those farmers in my electorate, those people particularly who have come from overseas and who have adapted and farmed in this area. Again, I pay tribute to those small farmers around my area who came here and not only learnt a new language and a new culture but who have also successfully farmed. I wish them well.

TIME EXPIRED