

Sugar Code of Conduct Disallowance motion Speech

Mr Speaker I have stood in this place on a number of occasions and spoken of my support for sugar cane farmers and in particular those cane farmers who fall under the umbrella of the Wilmar Sugar Mills. So it was with complete dismay that I learnt last week Senator David Leyonhjelm, in what can only be called a political stunt, moved a disallowance motion in the Federal Parliament on the Competition and Consumer (Industry Code—Sugar) Regulations 2017 which contains the Sugar Code of Conduct.

The fact this Disallowance Motion was moved by a Senator who has never visited the sugar cane growing areas of Queensland and whose knowledge of the sugar industry you could chisel on the back of an aspro with a crow bar defies logic.

The purpose of the Code is to regulate the conduct of growers, mill owners and marketers (of grower economic interest sugar) in relation to contracts or agreements for the supply of cane or on-supply of sugar, including requiring and providing for pre-contractual arbitration of the terms of an agreement.

It also ensures that supply contracts between growers and mill owners have the effect of guaranteeing a grower's choice of the marketing entity for the grower economic interest sugar manufactured from the cane they supplied. This is the share of exported sugar that the grower has to bear the price exposure risk. This Code of Conduct was introduced to create a level playing field between farmers and the millers, setting a framework for a fair process when commercial contract negotiations between grower representatives and large milling companies failed to come to an agreement.

The Disallowance Motion moved by Sen Leyonhjelm if successful would be disastrous for the sugar industry in Queensland and take away a dispute resolution mechanism that those on this side of the house have fought long and hard for.

Not only is the Sugar industry code of conduct under threat by Senator Leyonhjelm's disallowance motion but so is the entire sugar industry of Queensland. A sugar Industry that had just a matter of months ago ended a three year dispute that tore the heart and soul out of both the farmers of the State as well as my electorate of Burdekin.

Senator Leyonhjelm's will be chuffed when Labor votes with him to disallow the Code of Conduct, but I can guarantee when all hell breaks loose and the foundation of this multi-billion dollar industry is torn from beneath it, none of these members will hold themselves accountable for their short sighted and totally irresponsible action.

This is a Senator who lives in NSW and is completely out of touch with how our sugar industry works.

Just how out of touch you ask?

Mr Leyonhjelm stated

"If they want control over their marketing they always have the option of hiring a truck and sending their crop 300 kilometres down the road to a mill that sells into the socialist collective, if they don't like Wilmar."

These comments are absolutely rubbish, because as anyone who lives in a sugar cane growing area knows only too well, growers are forced to sell their harvested sugar cane to the closest mill because once harvested it is a perishable product.

Yes, I am passionate about this industry and not just because of my role as Shadow Minister for Agriculture. I am passionate about this industry because it holds the livelihoods of many of the hard working, dedicated constituents in my electorate of Burdekin, and Senator Leyonhjelm's actions in moving this Disallowance Motion is putting those livelihoods at risk, so rest assured I will not be taking a backward step in fighting this ridiculous attempt by Sen Leyonhlelm to repeal the Sugar Code of Conduct.