

SHANE KNUTH

Katter's Australian Party

Member for Hill



MEDIA RELEASE

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Government Inaction and Apathy helped Destroy Queensland's Dairy Industry

Member for Hill Shane Knuth has hit out at Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud after his recent comments in Australian Dairy Farmer News blaming drought and supermarkets on the drastic decline in dairy farm numbers.

Mr Knuth said that it was an LNP Federal Government who deregulated the Dairy Industry in 2000 and handed complete power and control of the industry and market to processors and the major supermarkets.

Mr Knuth said that while drought and major supermarkets certainly played a huge part in the decline of the industry, particularly through the dollar a litre milk wars era, both the Federal and State Government stood by and allowed this to happen, despite constant warnings and appeals from KAP MP's and the industry.

"It's a bit disingenuous for the Federal Ag Minister to deflect and lay blame at others, while the Federal Government has stood by for the last two decades, given processors and major supermarkets a free pass and shown little interest in fixing the industry," Mr Knuth said.

"For years, I and my Federal counterpart Bob Katter have been warning both State and Federal Governments that we need to improve legislation to give dairy farmers a better price for their milk."

"In 2016, I introduced to Queensland Parliament a bill to legislate for a 'Fair Milk Logo' to indicate that the milk producer was paid a fair price for their milk, which was voted against by both major parties."

Federal KAP Member Bob Katter also introduced a Farm Gate to Plate Bill in 2011 to legislate for a set minimum farm gate price paid to Dairy Farmers for their product.

"The decline in dairy farms in Queensland since deregulation by the feds is startling. Prior to deregulation in 2000, there were more than 270 dairy farms on the Atherton Tablelands alone. Now we have less than 50.

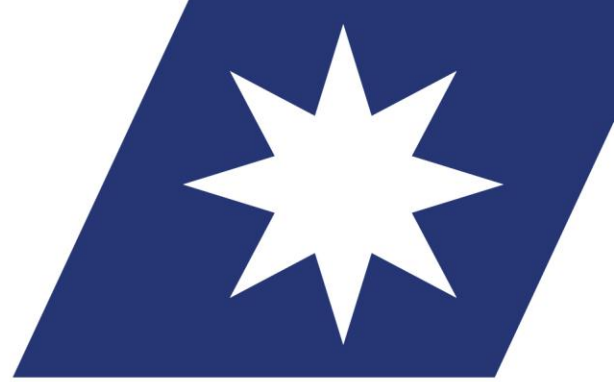
"Across the state there were 1,500 farms, which has now fallen to well below 300."

Mr Knuth said it was about time that the Australian Government recognised the need to strengthen laws surrounding supermarket prices for milk but warned this could be an election commitment that isn't followed through.

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"More pressure and legislation needs to be introduced to ensure large corporations give dairy farmers a fair price.

"This is a Federal and State government responsibility, which needs government action, not blame shaming."

Kennedy MP, Bob Katter, strongly agreed with Shane Knuth's criticism of the Federal Government's dairy policies, and said it was the LNP Government that imposed national competition policy upon the states.

"Qld Labor Premier Peter Beattie, who comes from the Atherton dairy area, held off deregulation for two years," Mr Katter said.

"In the end it was a cowardly action that he signed up to the national competition policy that has destroyed the industry and continues to see many farmers walk off the land.

"The dairy organisations, I might add, did not stand up and fight either. Farmers lost dairy quotas worth \$500,000 in annual earnings, all for a one-off payment of \$100,000.

"The current Federal Agriculture Minister is a devout believer in the free market. He does not believe in any government interference.

"So the two giant supermarkets that control 90 percent of food sales in Australia can set the price of milk to the consumer at any price they like, and they can set the price to the farmer at any level they want.

"Before deregulation the dairy farmers were getting 60 cents a litre, then after deregulation they were getting 39 cents a litre. But the price of milk to consumers actually went up. So, piggy in the middle is making an extra \$1,000m a year in extra profit. The farmers are getting less, and the consumers are paying more. Big powerful corporations are running this country.

"We need arbitration and collective bargaining back in the dairy industry. This would mean farmers can negotiate a fair price for their milk. Otherwise, we are simply serfs to foreign landlords."

CAPTION: Katter's Australian Party Member for Kennedy Bob Katter and Member for Hill Shane Knuth at Gallo's Dairyland on the Atherton Tablelands. PHOTO: Brian Cassey

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