



FAMILY FIRST



Steve Fielding Family First Senator for Victoria

**Senator Steve Fielding
Family First Leader**

Second Reading Speech

Wheat Export Marketing Bill 2008

17 June 2008

Family First will be opposing the *Wheat Export Marketing Bill 2008* and the *Wheat Export Marketing (Repeal and Consequential Amendments) Bill 2008* because most wheat growers want a wheat-marketing system that is owned and controlled by the growers.

The single desk has served growers well, so why would we throw it out and leave farmers, and especially small family farms, to the mercy of the big grain-marketing companies? The central aim of these big companies is to maximise their profits for their shareholders, not to serve farmers.

I had to be away from the Senate yesterday because my wife was ill, but I was able to listen to a lot of the debate yesterday on my PDA.

I must admit that I heard Senator Minchin, for the Liberal Party, wriggle around the issue of the single desk. If I had been up in the gallery, I think I too would have been jeering over the issue and saying, ‘What the heck is going on?’—particularly when you see something like this happening, which is so out of touch with what the wheat farmers across Australia are actually looking for. Family farmers are doing it tough, and the *Wheat Export Marketing Bill* will devastate a lot of farmers that rely on the single desk.

The Nationals stood here yesterday like Tarzan coming out of the jungle, beating their chests and saying, ‘We’re all for the farmers; we’re all for looking after the little guy.’ Well, where were they when they sold Telstra? When they sold Telstra, they sold the bush. Where in the heck were they when Telstra was going to be sold? Where were they with the Oil Code? The Nationals went missing in action on that one. Then we look at the sale of Medibank Private. They were going to support that as well. So where were they for the little guy and the bush

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in those cases? Then we look at Work Choices. Where were they on that one? They were supporting that one as well. And now they say, 'We're looking after the small guys; we're looking after the farmers.' That is just not true.

And now, all of a sudden, we have the Labor government with the Wheat Export Marketing Bill. I cannot believe it. The single desk is about collective bargaining—and I thought that was what Labor was all about.

The single desk was put in place in 1948 by the Labor Chifley government. Ben Chifley would not even recognise the party if he could see what you are doing here today.

The Labor Party is putting the interests of farmers in the hands of the big wheat-marketing companies. This bill is about market economics. It is about big business. This is about the Prime Minister selling out to big business and not looking after the small farmers.

In November 2006, the Prime Minister, the Hon. Kevin Rudd, wrote about free-market fundamentalism as 'the ruthless logic of the market rubbing up against a tradition which holds that those with economic power have a moral obligation to protect those without it'—a moral obligation to protect those without. This wheat marketing bill sells those people out. Where is the moral obligation to protect those who do not have that power?

Australian politics is dominated by the ideology of market economics—the free-market mantra. But what about those people who cannot fend for themselves? The old debates about collective bargaining and Work Choices have been thrown out the window with the wheat marketing board. Both the major parties have sold these people out big time.

Family First does support free enterprise, but not unfettered free markets. Too much regulation is no good, but not enough is no good either. Leaving people out on their own without any way of fending for themselves is just not right.

The interests of big business and small business are not always the same; in fact, they are often totally at odds with one another. The Labor government has chosen to side with big business, as it did when the Oil Code came around—when we were looking at petrol service stations and making sure that we had competition.

Yes, Family First agrees that it was wrong for the Australian Wheat Board to bribe Saddam Hussein's regime to buy wheat from Australia, but let us not use that as an excuse to throw out the single desk system, which has served farmers well for decades.