

Mr. JASPER (Murray Valley): I have the privilege to represent one of the finest areas in Victoria, and one of the most picturesque, productive and progressive - Murray Valley electorate. My home town is Rutherglen. Many honorable members will know of Rutherglen as part of the north-eastern wine district. It is often referred to as the wine centre of Victoria.

I should like firstly to pay tribute to some of the former members for the Murray Valley electorate. Firstly, I pay tribute to the Honorable George Moss, who represented Murray Valley for almost 27 years. I worked closely with the Honorable George Moss and I have the greatest admiration and respect for that man and for the work that he did as the representative for Murray Valley. For the past three years the Murray Valley electorate was represented by Bill Baxter. He presented himself as a diligent and hard-working member. I should also mention the Honorable Tom Mitchell, who represented the electorate of Benambra for some 29 years. Wangaratta was in that electorate but in the recent redistribution Wangaratta was brought back into the Murray Valley electorate. George Moss represented Wangaratta when it was originally in the Murray Valley electorate.

The Murray Valley electorate covers some 4,270 square kilometres. Considerable development has been seen in the area and this has been mainly related to primary industry and some secondary industry, especially in the City of Wangaratta. In the Cobram and Numurkah areas there has been probably the greatest ever soldier settlement development scheme undertaken in Australia. Throughout the Murray Valley there are diversified primary industries with most primary industries being represented somewhere or other throughout the Murray Valley. The eastern end of the Murray Valley is hilly and undulating, and this is where most of the primary industries are, especially the beef, sheep, wheat and winemaking industries.

The Murray Valley electorate stretches then to the western end where it flattens and where extensive irrigation, closer settlement and dairying can be seen, and with the fruit industry predominating. Many of the towns in the Murray Valley electorate rely for their viability on profitable primary industries. Numurkah and Cobram are two towns that have developed as a result of irrigation, extensive and closer settlement and of the fruit and dairying industries in particular.

Yarrawonga is on the River Murray on the shores of Lake Mulwala. It has developed as a tourists' aquatic paradise and in the holiday period the population of Yarrawonga doubles. I come then to Rutherglen, the centre of a booming wine industry where the wines of north-eastern Victoria have developed. The wineries there are producing wines which are equal to the greatest and best wines that are produced throughout the world.

The major centre in the Murray Valley electorate is the City of Wangaratta. It is the hub of north-eastern Victoria and particularly the hub for tourism in north-eastern Victoria. It is a magnificent city and without doubt one of the finest in Victoria with excellent amenities and facilities for education, sport and health. It has one of the finest hospitals in country Victoria. The population of Wangaratta has doubled in the past twenty years to more than 16,000. Two of the excellent industries that assisted in this development have been two of the great textile industries, Wangaratta Woollen Mills and Bruck Australia Ltd. These two companies employ between them in excess of 1,000 people.

In 1964 the State Government selected five centres for accelerated development. Wangaratta was not included as one of those centres, but the people of that town accepted the challenge and they formed the Wangaratta Development Committee. The people of Wangaratta took the attitude

that they would help themselves, and help themselves they surely did because they brought many industries to the area and attracted people who have been employed in those industries. The latest industry to be attracted to Wangaratta is the internationally known IBM Co. which acquired 125 acres of land at Wangaratta. At present there is a training team in Canada which is being trained at the headquarters of the company to be the nucleus for the development of this company which will begin operations in May. It will be the major and only centre for IBM in Australia and the only manufacturing plant in the south-west Pacific.

At the northern boundary of the Murray Valley lies the River Murray which extends along the boundary of the Murray Valley electorate for more than 200 miles. The Murray Valley has an important part to play in Victoria and indeed in Australia. The Murray-Darling catchment area covers approximately 414,000 square miles, which is approximately one-seventh of the total area of Australia. But enormous problems have developed in the River Murray. These will have to be tackled and faced in the future if they are to be corrected. The River Murray has been changed from its natural state. Some people claim today that it is just an unmaintained irrigation channel and even a sewer. It has been suggested in one quarter in South Australia that a concrete channel should be put alongside the River Murray to take the water.

Three States and the Commonwealth are responsible for the River Murray. A representative from each State and one from the Commonwealth comprise the River Murray Commission. It is interesting to note that no decision can be taken by the River Murray Commission unless it is the unanimous view of the four persons. Their prime responsibility is the provision of irrigation water and the management of the river as a system of water storages and supply. This is a most limited charter. Between the States and the Federal Government there are over 30 Government departments and authorities that have to be consulted on matters relating to the River Murray. Then on top of that there is the sensitive area of State rights. The existing system is not geared to reality, and present-day conditions. Piecemeal management will not produce any useful results.

One reality is the additional water that is brought into the Murray system from the Snowy Mountains Authority. It has been estimated that in the past twelve months to March, 1976, 810,000 acre-feet of water, which is approximately 30.8 per cent of the capacity of the Hume dam, has been brought into the Murray system. There is no control over this water or the times at which it comes into the River Murray, and this has created tremendous problems. I believe one authority should control all aspects of the River Murray. There should not be a piece-meal management; the charter should be extended and all aspects such as irrigation, flood mitigation, pollution and contamination, should be covered. With the development of the Albury-Wodonga complex I can see pollution and contamination are certainly areas that will need to be looked at and studied over the years. Erosion should be examined and also restoration following erosion that has already taken place.

Hundreds of cities and towns take their water from the River Murray. The quality and quantity of this water should be higher at all times. They should be looking at parks, recreational reserves, control of boating, noxious weeds and fish. A good example was brought to my attention recently of a noxious weed called the Noogoora burr. There is none of the weed on the Victorian side. It is a noxious weed in New South Wales and on the New South Wales side there are hundreds of acres of it alongside the River Murray.

Ecology and wildlife should be looked at. There should be a complete examination and control of the salinity in the River Murray. This problem is becoming more acute as time goes on. It has

been estimated that the amount of salt which goes past Swan Hill is something like a train load a day. This gives some idea of the problems connected with the River Murray. There should be an in-depth study of what the river can carry, whether the water should be put down and what quantities it can carry. The Snowy Mountains Authority should be controlled on what water it brings through the Murray and down the Murray system.

Finally, to give effect to all this uniform legislation should be introduced in all the State Parliaments concerned and the Federal Parliament to control this river, plus a generous budget to allow for complete and total management. Unless there is immediate action, the River Murray problem will be aggravated and probably will never be corrected.

The viability of the Murray Valley electorate and country Victoria is dependent on prosperous primary industry. Honorable members know of the enormous problems that face the beef and wool industries. Tremendous problems have been faced by Victoria's greatest decentralized industry, namely, the dairying industry. These problems were caused largely by dramatic reduction in world sales of dairy products and over-supply, particularly of skim milk powder, and Britain's entry into the European Economic Community. This industry faces complete collapse unless there is a change in the system and immediate financial assistance is given. I am pleased that the Federal and State Governments are now providing a Government guarantee on skim milk powder to the extent of \$300 a tonne for 1975-76.

I shall now deal with debt reconstruction. There should be more money to assist in reconstruction and no more farms should be opened up or given dairy licences. Further, I believe whole milk contracts should be phased out in the long term. There should be equalized returns to all producers and those on milk contracts should receive suitable compensation.

Another primary industry in the Murray Valley facing enormous problems is the canned fruit industry. This again is caused by Australia's outrageous inflation and Britain's entry into the European Economic Community, and the fact that the industry needs to export approximately 80 per cent of its production. It is also necessary to consider the costs and State charges against the fruit industry. Once again, it is necessary for the State and Federal Government to provide finance to assist the industry out of this trouble. There should also be a reduction in output and the introduction of a tree-pull scheme, which is more generous than the tree-pull scheme that existed in the past.

There is a need, I believe, for people to realize that not only do farmers and primary producers contend with the unpredictability of the Australian climate but also low prices, poor overseas markets, market manipulation in Australia, and tremendous cost burdens. Primary producers in Australia today are price takers, not price makers, and there is a real need for the Australian people through State and Federal Governments to recognize this problem and see that primary producers are assisted over this particular time of desperate need for financial assistance.

The result of the enormous problems of primary producers is financial burden and strain on businesses in cities and country towns. They are dependent on the strength and viability of primary producers for their profitability and survival. I agree with the honorable member for Burwood about the crisis in small businesses throughout Australia. Small businesses are the most productive and hard-working sector in Australia today. Thousands of the estimated 280,000 small businesses in Australia, I believe, will go out of business unless immediate action is taken to restore and help this section. They are under tremendous cost pressures and are caught in the vice of inflation. These problems are worst in country cities and towns. Small business has also

been aggravated by the tremendous plight of primary producers, and today most of the small businesses in country cities and towns are actually financing primary producers. The failure of small businesses will have tremendous and disastrous effects on the Australian economy, because over 650,000 people, representing something like 42 per cent of the workforce, are employed in small businesses.

I congratulate the Government on moves to set up the Small Business Development Corporation. It appears from the relevant Bill that the corporation will have certain powers to investigate all aspects of small businesses, including management and provision of finance at low interest rates. I am pleased at the Federal Government's attitude and action in reinstating the investment allowance, but more needs to be done. Pay-roll tax should be eliminated, not just on selected country industries, but on small businesses, all country businesses and primary producers.

I was pleased that late last year the Government said that it would double the exemption of pay-roll tax to small businesses, but when one examines what has been done, it is a bit of a sham. The amount was doubled from \$3,466, and once the pay-roll went over \$6,066 per month it went back to the original deduction of \$1,733. A business paying \$6,100 in wages for a month—that would be a business employing something like 6, 8 or 10 employees—goes back to the original deduction of \$1,733. I believe the total amount should be deducted, and then pay-roll tax paid from then on. In the information that honorable members have been given about the Small Business Development Corporation Bill, it has been suggested that a small business is rated as one employing fewer than 100 people. When small businesses employing 6, 8 and 10 people are considered, this eliminates all but a few from benefiting from pay-roll tax rebates.

Changes should be made so that higher pay-roll tax exemption is granted to more small businesses. There should also be a review of workers compensation. It was through pressure brought by the National Party that a board of inquiry was established into workers compensation, and I hope that the board works fast because many businesses have already gone to the wall. All honorable members know of many businesses that have closed their doors, and I can name some in Murray Valley that have closed down purely because of the cost of workers compensation.

The Federal Government should be urged to examine the taxation of private companies, because not only do they pay company tax, but also additional tax on undistributed profits—in other words, they are paying double taxation. This area should be examined and the Federal Government should be pressed to bring about changes to assist small businesses in this way.

My interest in politics, which began some fifteen years ago, stemmed from the desire to obtain equality of opportunity for all country people. That objective stands today, and we should be working to obtain equality of opportunity for all people throughout Victoria. Although I have been elected as a National Party member, I shall be working in the interests of all sections of the community and all voters in the electorate of Murray Valley to obtain the greatest possible development and improvements in educational facilities, employment opportunities, health, housing, decentralization and roads, to name just a few. My objective in Parliament will be to make Victoria a better place for all Victorians to live in.