



Speech by

Mr M. ROWELL

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (1.42 a.m.): Certainly right throughout north Queensland there are major concerns about a changeover to this Labor Government. Firstly, Madam Deputy Speaker, through you I congratulate the new Speaker of the House. It is a very important role within the parliamentary process. I also acknowledge the work of the previous Speaker, Neil Turner. He was a good friend and an excellent member and he did a lot for this precinct. The period I served with him in Government was a particularly interesting period.

I also acknowledge former member Naomi Wilson, who represented an electorate to the north of mine. She did an enormous amount of work. She took on a ministerial responsibility at a fairly late stage and worked as a Parliamentary Secretary prior to that. The work she did within the Parliament in relation to family services was very commendable.

I also acknowledge the speech made by the new member for Callide, Jeff Seeney. I think he hit the nail on the head on numerous occasions. He is a person of the land and he is well aware of the difficulties. During the period I was Primary Industries Minister, I went through Callide a couple of times and met with him. He has a good, firm grasp on the problems associated with Callide and certainly with rural industries.

Let us look through the scale of industries throughout Queensland. First there is mining. There is an absolute need for infrastructure. Major developments are going on at Cannington, Ernest Henry, Mount Isa and at numerous other mines in the western areas. Planning is a vital part of the future prospects of these mines, whether in relation to harbours or roads. We will see ports extended in Townsville and certainly Karumba.

Agriculture is another very important area, with fisheries and aquaculture and a whole range of other industries involved. They all come under the Department of Primary Industries. I believe some significant gains were made in those areas in the time the coalition was in Government.

We could look at the grazing industry principally in north Queensland or we could look at cattle. The loss of the Indonesian live cattle market was of great concern to a lot of people because being able to sell cattle into a market very close by was a great alternative. I commend the work of the live cattle export advisory committee and Don Heatley, who developed a live cattle trade with China. There were a few hiccups with blue tongue, but a suitable area was identified. After some involvement with AQIS and its equivalent in China, we made some good progress and I believe that we will be sending cattle over to China in the very near future. We will also be assisting the Chinese in developing their feedlots. Our technology is far superior to what they have at present. I believe we can be of great assistance and develop very good trade with them.

We are seeing a contraction of the cattle industry on the coastal belt as sugar takes over there. Currently the industry is worth \$2 billion and I believe somewhere in the future it will be worth very close to \$3 billion, of which about 90% will come from exports. Certainly it is presently 85%. Sugar really is the major primary industry in the State at this present time.

During the period I was Primary Industries Minister we had to deal with the issue of the single desk seller. Of course, it was a Federal issue as much as a State one and some amendments had to be made to the Trade Practices Act. That was secured with the Federal Government and I believe that the position of the single desk seller is now secure. It is the important section of the selling process of

the industry where we are not competing against ourselves but where we have a product that we can sell quite adequately to the rest of the world. We have very stringent quality controls and, of course, with those quality controls and the ability of the people to be agents for selling it, we have done particularly well in the past.

The other very important aspect of the sugar industry that I was involved in was the security of tenure of terminals. That is quite important. Unfortunately, prior to the Sugar Industry Act there was no ability for the industry to have ownership of these facilities. We were able to go through a process of deciding how we could give security of tenure. We have given the industry a long-term lease. It will now be up to the industry to divest the interests of those terminals. I believe that over a period of time the ownership will revert absolutely to each industry person in a fairly equitable situation. World prices for the crop are in the doldrums—they are going down—which will have a major impact on the sale of our sugar and on our ability to sell that sugar to a lot of countries throughout the world.

Mention was made of the threat of the exotic disease, smut, from the Ord. That will require leadership from the State Government in Queensland. This dreaded disease has the ability to devastate considerable areas of country. It can very often go unnoticed for some period of time. We believe that that is what may have happened in the Ord River. The disease can be carried by wind. It can be carried by contact through insects or equipment, or even by humans.

One of the best prospects we have for combating this disease is breeding resistant varieties. As time progresses, I believe we will need Government support to do that. We have to emphasise the need to crank up a breeding program over time. We need the support of a nationwide program to combat outbreaks of exotic diseases wherever they occur. Unfortunately, from time to time, despite our best endeavours they will be introduced. I witnessed that with the outbreak of black sigatoka in the banana industry. A grower in the Daintree area had to totally destroy 87 acres of his crop, without receiving very much support. Some support did come from the Federal and State Governments, but there really has been no mechanism to address this situation. I believe there is a role that Queensland can play, and we were on track and doing something about it prior to our leaving Government.

Horticulture is developing rapidly throughout the north. The coalition has mounted a number of successful campaigns to assist horticulture development. For example, we brought about the eradication of the papaya fruit fly in about half the time that the most optimistic people predicted. I believe that by 23 August this year we will have achieved total eradication. We will have to do some monitoring for about another eight months. If all goes well, the whole of north Queensland will be cleared of the papaya fruit fly. We have had problems with the spiraling white fly, which has been on Australian shores for some time. Unfortunately, it got into the Cairns area. The department acted very swiftly. We put a perimeter around the affected area. Live plant material could not be moved out of that area. As a consequence, we have been able to contain it. We also used some biological control with a wasp called the *Encarsia*. It has been particularly effective in reducing the spread of the spiraling white fly in the Cairns region at Edge Hill. There was also an unusual outbreak of the papaya fruit fly in the Torres Strait. The department acted very swiftly and took a thousand blocks with methyl eugenol as the attractant and Malathion as the chemical that kills it. I believe that it is going well at present.

We have a number of major industries on the tablelands. We are looking at export potential with mangoes, longans, lychees and avocados. On the coast, the banana industry dominates. It is probably worth about \$160m per year. Paw paws are worth \$10m per annum. Aquaculture is also extremely important.

I wish to mention that the Ingham TAFE College will be a reality. It will be of major benefit to my electorate. That was something that Labor axed back in 1990. That is just one of the reasons that I cannot support the motion moved by the Premier. I have witnessed what Labor will do when it gets into Government. It usually acts very swiftly to knock off programs in non-Labor electorates.

Tourism is a major industry in Cairns and, in the north, Mission Beach. I wish to make special mention of Port Hinchinbrook. I am pleased that the Premier is in the Chamber. About a year ago, the Premier attended a little soiree—a Night to Remember Forever. I understand that he acted as a waiter, along with the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources. The Governor's Speech mentioned the Government's commitment to tourism. However, it tried to put Port Hinchinbrook under. It cannot be consistent. That is another reason why I cannot support the Premier's motion. Why did the Government—then in Opposition—stick its nose into something that did not have a great deal to do with it?

Mr Foley interjected.

Mr ROWELL: The member is very friendly tonight. What does he have to say?

Mr Foley: I thought we almost had you there for a while.

Mr ROWELL: You nearly did, but not quite. You were getting close, but you could not quite get over the line. Each person paid \$85 to go to that soiree to fight against Port Hinchinbrook. That was absolutely amazing.

I wish also to mention a client survey carried out by AC Nielsen McNair which demonstrated clearly that the Department of Primary Industry in Queensland was providing an excellent advisory service and has been received extremely well. In the survey, "4" was considered to be the top figure for the rating. Some 954 producers acknowledged a score of 3.73, and 50 producers acknowledged a score of 3.76. That was extremely commendable for the department. But what happened? The Government sacked the director-general, Roly Nieper. He had a major involvement in the outcome of that survey. Labor had no regard for a person who made a major contribution to the success of this department. It is a great shame when a person of the calibre of Roly Nieper is axed because of the vindictiveness of this Government. That is another very good reason why I could not support its motion of confidence.

I acknowledge many of the professional officers who work in the department. In the four months that I was the Minister I travelled throughout much of Queensland. There was good spirit, a lot of achievement and a range of expertise second to none. To mention anybody would probably put the kiss of death on them, because this department—

Mr Palaszcuk: What did you do in four months?

Mr ROWELL: I am just about to get to that. I do not think I will have enough time.

I wish now to mention some of the achievements of the department. I am pleased that the member for Inala, the Primary Industries Minister, has raised this matter. The softwood and hardwood plantations are a great initiative of the department. About 30 years ago, the coalition planted a lot of these pine forests that we are now harvesting. If we had not done that, they would not have been there to harvest. If the Minister for Primary Industries visits the mill at Tuan some time, he will see one of the best operations anywhere in the country, if not the world.

Mr Palaszcuk: It is good news.

Mr ROWELL: I am pleased that the Minister agrees with me. The whole thing about this great plantation industry is that it employs about 17,000 people. This Government is very keen on employment; we should be planting more forests. We had a \$20m program to plant another 10,000 hectares of forest. I am sure the Minister will be supporting that. At present, the industry is worth about \$1.7 billion.

I turn to aquaculture, an area where we did some really interesting work in Government. I am sure this Government will support it, too. We put \$750,000 into Cairns for the breeding of barramundi cod and coral trout. That was an excellent project. In fact, I believe in the future this industry will be worth probably \$1 billion to Queensland. Some \$500,000 went into freshwater fisheries at Walkamin, where there is another excellent project. Some 42 ponds were put in there, and eels, sleepy cod and crustaceans are being bred. Does the Minister support that? That is great. Did his party close down the Bribie Island aquaculture station or let it run dead? Does the Minister remember that one?

Mr Veivers: No, Henry does not know where that is.

Mr ROWELL: He probably does not, but that is okay. At that station we are breeding Moreton Bay bugs and a whole range of other crustaceans. It is breeding whiting fingerlings that are being released into the Maroochy River. We put \$3m into the commercial fishing licence buyback. That was a great initiative allowing commercial fishers to get out of the industry with some dignity.

Mr Palaszcuk: What about the by-catch regulations?

Mr ROWELL: Hang on. We are moving on to the by-catch reduction devices. This will save a lot of fish kills. There has been a lot of support in the fishing industry for this. Of course, then we have the turtle exclusion devices which are doing an excellent job, too. To make sure that we had the best technology possible, we gave \$10,000 to John Olsen to expand his expertise overseas. I think that will prove to be money extremely well spent.

Mr Palaszcuk: We announced it.

Mr ROWELL: I am sure the member opposite will be supporting it. The member is too late; he has gone. We gave it to him about two months ago. The other thing we have got going is the vessel monitoring devices.

Mr Littleproud: A double opening.

Mr ROWELL: Yes, the member opposite will open things three times—even a tin of baked beans. He is that sort of a guy; he cannot keep his little fingers out of it. As far as the fishing industry is concerned, these vessel monitoring devices are excellent. There is a lot of support from the whole commercial fishing industry for the vessel monitoring devices. They had to be implemented in July to enable scallop fisheries to make sure that they kept out of the areas that they should not be in. We can

even expand that further now and put it into a lot of other areas so that they do not go into seagrass areas, and so on. I am sure that the new Minister for Primary Industries will be supporting all of those good initiatives that we came up with. It is excellent that he will be supporting them

In his Speech, the Governor referred to a centre for excellence for irrigation. We proposed \$12.5m for that. I think that is a good initiative. Does the member opposite agree with that? No, he has gone quiet. That was an initiative that we were really interested in getting up and going because I believe that we can save water and make better use of it if we have a centre for excellence for irrigation. Of course, if we do that, the money that is spent to build dams and so on can be extended.

Mr Palaszczuk: You don't want to build dams.

Mr ROWELL: We were going to build more dams. We were going to build \$1 billion worth of dams. Of course, I was really concerned about the 600 people whom the Government knocked out of the DPI. It was an absolute disgrace. We have them back there working with people. The client survey clearly demonstrated that there was a lot of support for what our former Government was doing. This Government has to match that, and we will be watching it to make sure that it does everything possible as far as the people on the land are concerned.

Mr Palaszczuk interjected.

Mr ROWELL: Anyway, I cannot stop.

Time expired.
