



Speech by

Mr M. ROWELL

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (4.41 p.m.): In rising to join this Address in Reply debate, I would like to pledge my loyalty to the Queen, her representative, the Governor of Queensland, and the democratic process of government in this State. Earlier I was listening to the member for Gregory talking about the importance of the family unit, and I would just like to reinforce that. Our wives and kids are so precious to us. Very often we do not give them the amount of attention that they deserve. I would like to recognise the role that my wife, Sandy, plays as well as that of my children, Michael, Andrea and Matthew. From time to time—and I am sorry that the Courier-Mail journalists have left the gallery—we are castigated because our children come in here to see us. As I come from a country area, I spend a lot of time away from home. When I was a Minister in particular, it was a great joy that the kids were able to come in and see me, go to tea with me and that sort of thing. Of course, the perception of that by journalists who report on what happens in this Parliament was all screwed up. That is something that concerns me greatly.

I would like to recognise the many people in the Hinchinbrook electorate who work for the Government, whether they be police officers, Family Services officers, teachers or whatever else. They all do a sterling job. The work that they do has been well recognised. We come across the odd person now and then who does not perform as well as he or she should, but generally those people who work for the Government do an excellent job, and I would like to recognise the role that they play.

The Hinchinbrook electorate extends from Ingham through to Cardwell, Innisfail and Tully. They are the major centres. Of course, there is a lot of area to cover. There are about 160-odd kilometres between the two major centres, Innisfail and Ingham, and travelling up and down takes up a lot of my time. In fact, I probably spend something like 600 hours a year driving around in a car to represent the people of my electorate. I have to travel a lot of kilometres, but it is important to attend many functions. I think the use of a vehicle is extremely important. We have the modern-day fax machines, we can talk to people over the phone, we can do all sorts of things to relay messages to people, but at the end of the day, the best method is eye-to-eye contact. That is what people have become used to and what they expect.

Some very good people have assisted me in the electorate. A young lass by the name of Leonie De Lai works in the office. My former secretary, Helen Fuller, has retired after 23 years of service. An electorate secretary who is able to perform that duty for such a long period really needs to be recognised. We did have a barbecue the other night out at our place to recognise the length of service that she has given to the electorate—not just to me for the almost nine years that I have been the member but also for the 14-odd years that she served another member. I do not think many people would have the tolerance to serve for that period in an electorate office, but Helen Fuller did exactly that. I have also received very strong support from the people in my party. I would like to recognise Robbie Collins, the new electorate chairman. I would also like to recognise all those branch members who have given me a great deal of support over the past nine years.

The principal industries throughout the electorate are really based on agriculture. Of course, tourism comes into it as well. The important thing about agriculture is that it is a regenerative industry. Along with the agricultural industries, many secondary industries, such as boilermakers, manufacturers of machinery specifically used in the cane industry or in the fruit industry, and the suppliers—the people who have many thousands of dollars of supplies on the shelves to assist those people in the

agricultural industries—depend on agriculture. They are all part and parcel of what makes the Hinchinbrook electorate work.

At present, the beef industry in the electorate is declining, principally because of the expansion of the sugar industry. Over a 10-year period the district, including Tully, has probably experienced a 30% increase in sugar production. Sugar is certainly our largest agricultural industry and, of course, it was the first cab off the rank in having to deal with the National Competition Policy of which we hear so much. The sugar industry was faced with losing the single best seller and it had to put aside tariffs to ensure that it could keep that single best seller—something that is extremely important in terms of trade with other nations. The industry exports something like 85% to 90% of its product. Very few industries would have such a level of export component in the sale of their products.

The total value of sugar to the electorate is something like \$350m. The Innisfail district crushes about two million tonnes for which it receives some \$84.2m. About 70% of the Innisfail cane crop is in the Hinchinbrook electorate. Over the past 30 years, the Innisfail district has experienced some major problems. The sugar content of the cane in that region has decreased. During the time that I was Minister for Primary Industries, I was able to provide some \$300,000 over a three-year period to enable that district to address this issue of low sugar content in the cane.

Mr Lucas: Why? Why is it happening?

Mr ROWELL: Yes, good question. Would you know? You would not know whether you are coming or going.

Mr Lucas: That's why I'm asking you. You obviously don't think it's serious.

Mr ROWELL: It is serious—extremely serious, but you are very jovial. You have got no idea about rural industries. You live in a modern——

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Would the honourable member address the Chair?

Mr ROWELL: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your protection.

Mr Braddy: Don't be so touchy. He's asking you a question.

Mr ROWELL: Yes, and I am responding to him.

Because of the world price decline, farmers have very marginal profits at present. That is a major concern when the industry is already in jeopardy because of the low sugar content. We hope to address that. The BSES has also clearly indicated that it will provide something like \$1m, too. There is no land for expansion. Expansion has been one of the ways in which other areas have been able to address the marginalisation that has been occurring. They have produced other crops. Bananas are being grown in Innisfail and this has resulted in over-production. This has caused a dilemma in another industry. In 1997-98 the Tully mill crushed about 1.85 million tonnes and received something in the vicinity of \$78.67m. There are large areas available for expansion. The King Ranch area has been busted up and there is cattle land available.

The Mourilyan mill and the South Johnstone mill in the Innisfail district are using road transport to cart cane along the highway for distances of from 60 to 100 kilometres. Last financial year the Ingham mills crushed 5.2 million tonnes, which had a value of \$238.5m. Expansion has come to a standstill in that area principally because it appears there will be no major increase in the crushing capacity at Macknade mill and Victoria mill.

I would like to address some remarks to the terminals. The Ports Corporation is in charge of two terminals in my electorate, namely Mourilyan and Lucinda. Mourilyan is becoming a major port which exports sugar and molasses. Extensions will be carried out in the near future to allow the handling of other cargo. The passage into Mourilyan Harbour has been deepened by some 10 metres at the low tide mark. This will enable bigger ships to enter the port. The coastguard at Mourilyan is extremely important. Whilst the area contains a sugar terminal and other major boating facilities, we also have a boat ramp which is important for recreational fishing and boating. It is important that we are able to preserve areas for sailing in Mourilyan Harbour. We have been able to secure long-term security for the terminals with a 100-year lease. The interest in the terminals will be returned to the people who originally supplied the money, namely, the growers and the millers. Currently the terminals have a value of some \$350m. I am sure if we were to rebuild the terminals it would cost somewhere in the vicinity of \$1 billion.

The Lucinda terminal has a continuous conveyor that extends five kilometres out to deep water. Sugar from this terminal is exported. The coastguard activities in this area provide an extremely important service at Dungeness. People who go to sea in small craft and find themselves in difficulties are often rescued by the coastguard in this area.

I would now like to consider some of the environmentally friendly issues in which the sugar industry is currently engaged. There is no burning of the crop in the southern sector of the electorate. Trash blanketing prevents erosion. During the period when we were in Government, the former Minister,

Brian Littleproud, and I had the great pleasure of announcing the introduction of codes of practice for the industry. I believe these codes of practice will be of great benefit to the industry, to the environment and to the people.

There is concern about owls. The Rufus owl assists in the control of rats. There is a rodenticide called Klerat which is not being used in the industry now because it has been found to be injurious to owls. The owls have been picking up rats after they have been baited and have been affected by the pesticide. Currently, many farmers are building nesting blocks which will be of major benefit in an attempt to increase the number of owls in the area.

The sugar industry is probably the best organised primary industry in Australia. There would be very few industries which would have invested a higher percentage of their income in the export arena. Horticulture is another important industry in the electorate. I want to speak about the South Johnstone Research Station. The capacity of this research station has been underutilised. I believe we need to look at this matter in the future. If the coalition had continued in Government I am certain that we would have put more work into that area.

The biggest crop in the northern section of the electorate is probably bananas, which have been principally planted in Tully and Innisfail. As I mentioned earlier, price is becoming a problem because of over-production. These crops have been planted because of the sugarcane problems in the area. At the moment the value of the banana crop is expected to range between \$150m to \$180m. The cultivation of pawpaws is another important industry and is worth about \$10m. Disinfestation is occurring at the present time and, with improvement, it is highly likely that pawpaws could become an export industry. Lychees, rambutans and passionfruit are probably worth about \$8m in this area and are gaining in popularity. This is an ideal region for the growing of these crops. More research is required to support the industry. Specialised work would be a boost to productivity. Programs such as IPM are extremely important.

Quarantine is another major issue in the north. When the coalition was in Government we provided \$3.1m for Northwatch over four years. North Queensland is extremely vulnerable to pests arriving from Papua New Guinea and the northern regions of the world. The banana industry is currently dealing with black sigatoka. We are well aware of the papaya fruit fly. Spiraling whitefly is another problem.

The Hinchinbrook electorate has about 11,000 hectares of Caribbean pine. The harvesting and sawmilling operation is at a stage where it will be of major benefit to the electorate in the very near future. This industry should provide some 100 jobs. The forestry plantings commenced in 1967.

Another industry that is growing in recognition is tourism. Important tourism areas in the electorate include Wallaman Falls, Mission Beach, Etty Bay, the rainforest areas, Cardwell and Port Hinchinbrook. Paronella Park will become a major tourist attraction under the present owner who is putting a lot of effort into providing tourist-type activities. Port Hinchinbrook has been under the microscope. This area contains an all-weather boat ramp. Many cars and trailers are parked in the area from daylight till dark. This allows people to go boating in this magnificent area. The Port Hinchinbrook project has copped its share of criticism over a long period of time. The dredged water that comes from the complex goes into ponds and is much cleaner than the water on the surrounding mud flats. The promoter of that resort is doing an excellent job despite all the criticism he has received.

The H road from Millaa Millaa to the Tully Gorge is very important. This is a World Heritage area. To date we have achieved some success in having this road constructed. Whitewater rafting on the Tully River is very well patronised. Additional capacity in this area has been bogged down by four years of inquiries, and there are more to come.

The Australian-Italian festival and the Feast of the Three Saints attracted some \$25,000 worth of support from the previous Government. I hope this Government supplies a similar level of support. These festivals receive outstanding support from Australia and other parts of the world. Many of the people who attend the festival from overseas are of Italian background.

We have some 300 hectares of aquaculture in the electorate. This industry is involved principally with crustaceans—mainly prawns. The industry is contributing to our export income and is providing jobs. This area is an ideal location as far as salinity and water temperature are concerned. We now have some programs involved with breeding barramundi. One farmer is producing about 150 tonnes a year. This person is also looking closely at breeding barramundi, cod and coral trout. We provided something like \$750,000 to the Cairns research station to do more work in this area because, particularly in the live trade, both those species are worth a lot of money to Australia. I am absolutely certain that that will be money well spent.

The commercial fisheries in my electorate are substantial. They are conducted mainly out of Innisfail—through Mourilyan harbour, the Johnstone River, and at Ingham—through Dungeness. Roads in my electorate are an extremely important issue that must be dealt with in the future. Because of the nature of areas in the Wet Tropics, roads break up quite easily. We rely on them for heavy transport,

particularly in the sugar industry. The Bruce Highway has had a lot of work done on it, but more needs to be done. There are some major road problems in the Innisfail area, particularly in the approaches to Innisfail. There is a very bad turnout arrangement there that has caused some angst to people. In fact, a death was caused by people who were travelling in the wrong direction.

I turn now to sugarcane transport. Something like 500,000 tonnes will be transported on the main highway from Cardwell to Innisfail to the mills that have taken up land in the southern section of the electorate. Much of that transport is undertaken by B-doubles, and a lot of work needs to be done on council roads to cater for those B-doubles. \$2m was to be provided for a grade separation at Grasso's Road, which is south of Ingham, so that travellers on that road do not have to deal with lights when canetrains are crossing the main highway. Another concern is the \$320,000 for a multipurpose bridge——

Time expired.
