



Speech by

**Mr M. ROWELL**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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Hansard 11 November 1998

**SUGAR INDUSTRY**

**Mr ROWELL** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (10.26 a.m.): During the Estimates hearings for the Department of Primary Industries and on other occasions since the Minister implied that I had confused canegrowers with the promise of \$300,000 over three years to address the c.c.s. decline in north Queensland. On this issue, and on many others, such as the apportionment of the Federal funds of \$13.45m, the only confused person is the current Minister for Primary Industries. The Minister is playing politics with the difficulties in which people find themselves, and that is not being well received by the people in far-north Queensland.

In recent years, canegrowers in the area from Tully north have experienced low returns owing to the depressed state of sugar content in the crop. Extraordinary early spring rain this year has compounded the situation. It was essential to turn around that severe loss by commencing research. When Labor won Government, the need to address sugar decline turned into a need to address yield decline. I do not think that the Minister knows the difference yet.

Recently, I attended meetings in Innisfail convened by the council. The Johnstone Shire had received requests from growers to defer the payment of their rates owing to their lack of finances. Sugarcane farmers are growing alternative crops such as bananas to supplement their incomes. However, the increased supply of bananas has glutted the domestic market and caused returns barely matching the cost of production. Despite the benefits of single desk selling, the returns for next year's sugar crop are expected to reflect low world prices.

Wet weather conditions are causing harvesting delays and ratoons are being affected severely. The plant crop for next year has responded unfavourably to the flooded fields. In many cases, poor germination has resulted.

Time expired.

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