



Speech by

Mr M. ROWELL

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard 19 November 1998

TARIFF PROTECTION, SUGAR INDUSTRY

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (6.23 p.m.): I rise to second the amendment to the motion moved by the member for Crows Nest. I do not think that the Minister is aware of or understands what is happening with the single desk seller. The Federal Government amendments have certainly made sure that the position of the single desk seller is secure and is enshrined in legislation. I do not know if the Minister really knows what he is talking about, because that has already been done and it complies with all of the provisions of the National Competition Policy. The Minister should know that there is about six million tonnes north of Tully—

Mr Palaszczuk: You talk to Harry Bonanno.

Mr ROWELL: The Minister should talk to Harry Bonanno. I do not know if the Minister knows what he is talking about. Approximately six million tonnes of cane is seriously affected by low sugar levels. I have represented part of the Tully and Innisfail area, and I know that the decline in sugar levels has been apparent for some time. That issue needs to be addressed. When the Labor Party was in Government, it did nothing. When we came to Government, we recognised that there was a problem and we provided \$300,000 in funding. Of course, the problem was highlighted during a Cabinet meeting in the Mulgrave Mill area. Growers from that region were very concerned about the decline in sugar levels. For some five years they had experienced extremely low sugar levels. In fact, they are doing a quite a bit of research into the problem themselves and I congratulate them on their initiative.

The current Minister is absolutely confused. The \$300,000 that the coalition provided to this area must be returned. I show the Minister Budget Paper No. 2 1998, which I will read because the Minister cannot read very well. Under the heading, Commercial Cane Sugar Decline Strategy, it states—

"Funding of \$0.3 million over three years is provided to investigate and address declining sugar content (commercial cane sugar) in North Queensland."

Our Budget paper stated that, yet the Minister says that it is not there. He does not know what he is talking about. He has blinkers on. The Minister does not want to accept the fact that we did that and that he has messed it up. Instead of talking about sugar decline, he is talking about yield decline. That shows that he is an absolute novice in this area. I am a sugar grower and I know exactly what the industry needs.

Mr Palaszczuk: So did you in your press releases.

Mr ROWELL: Which press release? I think that the Minister is absolutely confused.

When there is a change of Government, things change. This Government is absolutely confused about what it needs to do. The Federal Government provided approximately \$13.45m and, of course, that will be administered by the Sugar Research and Development Corporation. That organisation has probably received 60 to 70 applications for that funding. It is absolutely essential that the problem of low sugar levels be addressed through that budgetary provision. We must make sure that that money is directed into research into this problem. That is extremely important.

I turn to the trade-off that occurred with the tariff, which is quite significant. One had to comply with the National Competition Policy, which was introduced by the Federal Labor Party and supported by the Labor Party in this State in 1995, to ensure that we were all clean and up to scratch—

Mr Mickel: And supported by you, you hypocrite.

Mr ROWELL: We had to do it, otherwise we would have lost funding.

Mr Mickel: You promised that to three or four different groups.

Mr ROWELL: The Labor Party signed off on it and we had to support it. We had no option. You were not here. You were running around the back there at that time. You were doing all those frivolous things that you used to do.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member will address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr ROWELL: We had to ensure that the industry maintained its single desk seller. I assure the House that the Federal Government has enacted legislation to enshrine the position of the single desk seller.

Time expired.
