



Speech by

**Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK**

**MEMBER FOR INALA**

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Hansard 11 March 1999

**RURAL QUEENSLAND**

**Hon. H. PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries) (6.14 p.m.): I second the amendment to the motion moved by the Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources. As the Minister for Primary Industries, I have made it my business to consult directly with primary producers and their families from across Queensland. Direct consultation is a prime role for any Government and it has been the prime role of this Government.

Last week, I attended the meeting of Australian agricultural Ministers in Adelaide. I was the only Minister to argue against a Federal Government sponsored proposal to put exceptional circumstances further out of the reach of needy primary producers. The change puts greater onus on the applicants for exceptional circumstances and serves to put the assistance needed by our embattled producers further out of their reach.

Under the new guidelines, producers will not be able to access assistance unless it can be proved that the impact to their incomes of this exceptional event is rare. Currently, applicants for exceptional circumstances have to prove the event impacting on primary producers is rare and severe, and that the farm income impact is severe. The coalition in Canberra has changed that to force applicants for exceptional circumstances to prove that the farm income impact was not only severe but was also rare. That may not sound like a major change, but its impact on struggling producers, their families and their communities will be enormous. This change just raises the bar for this assistance. It puts assistance out of the reach of the people who need it and the people the assistance is designed to help. Assistance packages must be accessible to the people who need the assistance, or they should not be called assistance packages.

The Department of Primary Industries is working with the sugar and horticulture industries in far-north Queensland to compile a case for exceptional circumstances. The department has revised the case for exceptional circumstances assistance for our embattled pork producers. The previous Borbidge Government assisted in lodging a submission for our pork producers last year, but the Federal Government rejected it. This Government has reduced the interest rate for concessional loans on offer from 5.5%, as it was when the Borbidge Government lost office, to 4%. The Government also made changes to the security arrangements giving producers greater access to that assistance. The previous coalition Government refused to do this. The previous coalition Government did not believe that needy producers deserved greater access to assistance measures, even at times of greatest need in the wake of natural disasters.

It is interesting to revisit the response of the former Treasurer, the member for Caloundra, to Cyclone Justin which hit far-north Queensland. According to the former Treasurer, concessional loans were available at 6%. That was what the former Treasurer gave to our producers following Cyclone Justin: concessional loans at 6%. Our Government has reduced those loans to 4%.

I turn to the sugar industry. One of the final matters considered by the House last year was the amended motion that I moved regarding the single desk selling arrangements for sugar. The amended motion sought the support of the Parliament to urge the Federal Government to advocate in international forums for the retention of the single desk for the sale of export sugar. That motion was essentially about two matters: firstly, maximising the marketing power of Queensland canegrowers and, secondly, maximising returns to the sugar industry. Parliament supported that motion. I reported that to the Federal Trade Minister, Mr Fischer. Mr Fischer has now replied to my letter of November last year. In his letter, Mr Fischer assured me that the Federal Government will take the policy of retaining sugar's single desk into international forums. However, Mr Fischer went on to say—

"The Government has been defending this position with the United States directly and in discussions with the W.T.O. and O.E.C.D.

We expect to see these issues raised in the W.T.O. agricultural negotiations and should be under no illusions that it will be easy to maintain our position."

Mr Fischer's comments serve to highlight the importance of the motion passed by this Parliament late last year. Single desk selling works and this Government backs it.

In support of the Honourable Minister for the Environment, I fully endorse the amendment. In the short time that it has been in office, this Government has done more for our primary producers than the previous Government did in the two and a half years that it was in office and more than the National Party Government did in the 32 years that it was in office before that. Our Government is about looking after all of Queensland.

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