



Speech by

**Mr M. ROWELL**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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Hansard 10 November 1999

### **SUGAR INDUSTRY BILL**

**Mr ROWELL** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (3.17 p.m.): I think that, in every way possible, the Opposition—that is, the coalition parties—have tried to work through this Bill with the Minister. This Bill has been largely devised by the Sugar Industry Review Working Party. However, I think that a few things have been introduced into the Bill which do not necessarily reflect what that review party intended. Of course, the change that is now occurring in the Primary Producers' Organisation and Marketing Act is of some concern to us, because it does interrupt quite severely the structure of the growing side of the industry.

Over a long period, that structure has served the industry particularly well. Unfortunately, this Government has decided to do away with that structure. I do not think there is a lot of support out there on the growing side of the industry, yet there is an independent organisation which, over a period, has flourished. Any grower who was not satisfied with what was happening with the statutory organisation had the right to join that particular organisation, and it has quite a considerable membership.

There are things that we have discussed in the Bill, such as the sugar analysis and the check chemists, about which we are not satisfied. What is going to happen regarding the funding for the BSES is not very clear. That is of particular concern to the growers but more so to the millers. They have a need to have some input as regards the quality of cane and the methods of growing it.

As to the funding—there is a direction by the Minister that he is going to address that situation so that the fifty-fifty equity of both growers and millers is maintained. Yet, unfortunately, that is not reflected in the legislation. I have no doubt that the Minister will try to do something about it, but until we see something in black and white in legislation we will continue to raise this issue because it is one of the key elements regarding the future direction of the industry. We have had success over a long period in growing and milling the crop. When it comes to cane production, we have led the rest of the world in many respects. Unfortunately, many countries such as Brazil and some of the undeveloped countries have adopted a lot of the principles and the technology that we have developed in Australia. They have taken that technology and, with low-cost labour, have been able to compete more than favourably against us. That causes us a great deal of angst.

I am concerned about the political direction of this legislation. I spoke about this matter yesterday and I do not want to deal with it at any great length today. For an industry to flourish it has to have the capacity to get on with the job and not be subject to undue influence from Government departments purely on the basis of political policy. I can only hope that the Minister will take that message to Cabinet. I sincerely believe that the Minister will do that. I know how many people sit around the Cabinet table, and I know that sometimes things do not go in the direction that one desires. There are competing interests in the Cabinet room. For the most part, the Minister belongs to a party that is more interested in the Green vote than it is in the welfare of primary producers.

Despite what is contained in this legislation, I have never witnessed any of the four organisations that the Minister has mentioned displaying political activity. I would hate to see any prohibition placed upon those organisations because of some perceived political interference. The people involved in those organisations are very professional people. I have never thought of asking them whether they belong to any particular political party. If we are going to get the best out of those

organisations, the last thing we want to do is cast any doubt upon their political views as individuals. I am extremely disappointed that this has been so clearly spelt out in the legislation.

The sugar industry is a very big industry and it contributes an enormous amount to the economy of Queensland. I hope that we will not see this legislation having a detrimental effect on the industry. I sincerely hope that this legislation will be reviewed when the coalition returns to Government. I would ask the Minister to review the legislation if he finds that difficulties arise in the future. We do not want anything to inhibit the organisations involved in the industry. This is an industry which places 85% to 90% of its product on the world market. It has to be an efficient industry to be able to do that. A lot of hard work has gone into the building up of this industry. Mistakes have been made, but it has been a very good industry for Queensland.

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