



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 11 March 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Acid Sulfate Soils

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (10.05 a.m.), by leave: One of the greatest threats to our environment, particularly our coastal region, is the disturbance of acid sulfate soils. This Government is taking a proactive approach in dealing with acid sulfate soil issues through improved policies and support for collaborative training, mapping and research programs. We intend to protect our environment for the whole community and for future generations.

When disturbed for agricultural, industrial or urban development, acid sulfate soils can generate large volumes of sulfuric acid. This can seep into adjacent waterways, severely damaging the environment, degrading local fisheries resources and corroding private and public concrete infrastructure. Management of these high-risk soils is a concern to industry, urban and tourist development and the conservation movement. This Government is working towards whole-of-Government solutions on this critical environmental and economic issue. We are developing a multilateral approach across State and local governments and industry.

My Department of Natural Resources has been nominated as the lead agency for coordinating acid sulfate soil matters. An interdepartmental committee is being established and an investigation into policy mechanisms has been launched to specifically address this issue. I am actively encouraging links between stakeholders in the community and industry, and local and State Governments through the Queensland Acid Sulfate Soils Management Advisory Committee. That committee has been working cooperatively on this issue for two years.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation.

Mr WELFORD: A Statewide education and awareness program is under way, and to date over 30 major workshops and forums have been held across the State, attended by 2,000 people. The success of this strategy can be measured by a recent two-day technical workshop in Townsville, which was booked out, with over 80 people attending. Two workshops were needed at Ingham to meet the increasing interest of local farmers and canegrowers.

To further assist industries develop good management practices, my department is providing technical guidelines and advice on how to assess and manage acid sulfate soils. A vital component of developing management solutions is research, and this is being undertaken by my department in collaboration with the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Sugar Production, the CSIRO and others.

To support planning schemes, my department is mapping acid sulfate soils distribution in south-east Queensland where coastal areas are under immense and increasing land use pressure. Mapping and identification of these risk areas is crucial to manage development in coastal regions. An increased knowledge of high risk areas will save developers, land-holders and the community time and money in the development application process.

Our Government is determined to address this issue to provide certainty to industry and to ensure that coastal development is conducted only where it is sustainable in the long term.