



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 20 July 2000

SUGAR INDUSTRY

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (10.21 a.m.): The most important decentralised industry in Queensland is in diabolical trouble after three consecutive years of absolutely disastrous seasons, caused mainly by adverse weather conditions and rat plagues and, thrown in for good measure, a downturn in the world sugar price to the lowest level ever in real terms. The sugar industry is the backbone of many regional communities along the Queensland coast, many of which are feeling the icy blast of this extended downturn. Shops are closing, machinery sales are almost non-existent and the general prosperity of each of those communities is at an all-time low. The value of farms is severely depressed—that is, of course, if a buyer can be found—and this alone has major implications for farmers' equity in their own farms.

Banks are becoming very nervous about the level of debt in many farming operations. Contract harvesters are in an absolute no-win situation with low tonnage crops and now have to cover huge areas to achieve their daily tonnage supply to mills. They have to operate for long hours in adverse conditions, which increases wages and fuel bills. The mills are also having to add coal or oil to the cane fibre used to fire the boilers so the sugar can be processed, and that is costing Mackay Sugar between \$30,000 and \$60,000 per week. The sugar industry—Canegrowers, the Australian Cane Farmers Association and the Australian Sugar Milling Council—has submitted a proposal to both the Queensland and Federal Governments. It is fair to say that the Federal Government is copping a bit of stick for not acting on the proposal quickly enough. However, I understand that the Queensland Government has actually had this proposal for longer than the Federal Government, yet we have not heard one word from this Government.

The package is in the form of a repayable grant and, in the past, the Queensland Government has always been at the fore in supporting its industries and communities. However, this Government seems hell-bent on allowing this major primary industry in Queensland to go to the wall. What is the Premier doing? A bit of leadership in this area would not go astray. This is one situation that those opposite cannot laugh off.

Time expired.
