



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 6 December 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Black Sigatoka

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.04 a.m.), by leave: In April this year the fungal leaf disease in bananas, black sigatoka, was detected in the Tully Valley production area. This area is part of the largest banana production area in Australia. Black sigatoka reduces banana production and, as such, the disease is a serious threat to the industry and its capacity to supply markets. The Queensland government, along with industry, the federal government and the governments of banana-producing areas—New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Western Australia—entered into a cost-sharing agreement for an eradication program.

Previous responses to black sigatoka detections have involved the total destruction of banana plants immediately around the infestation. The latest outbreak is the first time black sigatoka has occurred in a major banana production area. There has been significant progress in this very difficult campaign in reaching the milestones set for it. However, the latest assessment report indicates that not all milestones have been achieved within the time frame. Chiefly among those milestones was the requirement for zero visible leaf disease on commercial plantations. While not all the milestones have been achieved under the original timetable set for this joint program, there remains an important window of opportunity for the eradication program.

I have already written to the federal Agriculture Minister, Warren Truss, seeking an urgent teleconference of all the respective Agriculture Ministers to be called to discuss and reach agreement on the future direction of our program. The Queensland government has been committed to the campaign from the outset. However, the campaign is a joint effort between industry, the federal government, and the states and the Northern Territory. It is critical at this time that those jurisdictions reaffirm their commitment and that the eradication campaign progresses. Black sigatoka has been detected in Queensland, but it is a fundamental issue for the Australian banana industry, not just the Queensland banana industry.

These matters of national biosecurity and the related issues of trade and market access need be taken seriously. The Queensland government does take it seriously and that is why I am seeking the reaffirmed commitment from the Commonwealth and the banana-producing jurisdictions for the black sigatoka eradication effort.
