



Speech by

**ANDREW McNAMARA**

**MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY**

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Hansard 8 August 2002

**DRUGS MISUSE AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr McNAMARA** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (3.52 p.m.): I rise to speak very briefly to the Drugs Misuse Amendment Bill 2002 and to support the bill very strongly. I have a significant number of sugar producers in my electorate, as do many members. The sugar industry is a very significant part of the Wide Bay economic base. I share the community's great concern about the difficulties in the sugar industry posed by very low world prices which, in most cases, have put the price of production above the world market price. Our farmers are obviously having grave difficulty producing sugar at a price that is profitable when the world price is down as low as US 5c a pound.

This issue has to be confronted with smart and different thinking and with new strategies. The sugar industry needs options. I recently returned from an overseas trip which included Taiwan, a proud sugar producing country with a long history of industry involvement. Taiwan recently announced that it will exit the sugar production market in 2004. The Taiwanese government has formed the view that it is unlikely to be able to produce sugar at a profit in the foreseeable future and has decided not to continue. A debate is taking place in Cuba along the same lines. Again, Cuba is a country founded upon sugar. It is part of the national culture. Cuba is also at a point where it simply cannot make sugar pay.

We are working very hard in Australia—and perhaps this is the subject of a different debate—but there is no question that we must give our primary producers different ways of producing crops that are profitable and which allow them to stay on the land and allow families who are of the land to maintain that tradition. Industrial hemp is a good alternative crop and the government is to be congratulated for pursuing this so vigorously.

Other alternative land uses, such as chickory, have great potential. Again, the Department of State Development has been working very hard to see chickory go into production as a companion crop to sugar. Similarly, ethanol is a different end use for the sugar crop. These are Smart State alternative ideas which we must pursue if we are to give those industries a new lease of life and a future. I want to keep people on the land. I want to keep people who produce sugar and primary industries in my area, farming, working and making a profit. This legislation gives them hope. I congratulate the minister for bringing this legislation forward and I commend the bill to the House.