



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 20 August 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Science in Parliament; Sugar Industry

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.04 a.m.): I commend the second annual Science in Parliament to all honourable members.

Mr Beattie interjected.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I do not think so, Premier. We are too humble. It is an initiative that originated with the Department of Primary Industries last year. This year there are 32 scientists from the Department of Primary Industries in attendance. This is the largest contingent from any scientific organisation at Science in Parliament. The contingent, of course, is led by DPI's Chief Scientist, Dr Joe Baker. Our department continues to be a driving force in science and practical application of science across the width and breadth of the state with researchers from as far afield as Charleville, Charters Towers, Biloela, Toowoomba, Cairns and right here in Brisbane.

I also want to support the statements made by our Premier and the Minister for State Development about the need for sugar industry reform. No-one who in the sugar industry can sensibly argue that the status quo should remain. The status quo is killing the industry. Already, the projections for the sugar price this season are lower than last year and well below the estimated costs of production. Our government has made significant positive reforms on behalf of the sugar industry. We have returned more than \$380 million in terminal assets back to growers and millers. We have given industry control of marketing, and now we are in the process of giving industry direct control of its research and development. Further reform of the sugar industry is needed.

We now have a reform package that aims to remove the impediments and provide \$150 million in assistance to help industry to adjust to the changes and build a stronger future. We are not proposing hit and run reform. We are not proposing to do what the Howard and the Borbidge governments did in 1997 when they removed the sugar tariff. The sugar tariff was worth \$55 per tonne to growers. The tariff was taken away with no plan to take the industry forward and no substantial assistance package to underpin the changes. What we are proposing to do is to secure the future of the sugar industry with real reform and real assistance to back it up. It is true that many of the sugar industry's problems—such as world sugar prices and seasonal conditions—are beyond our control. But we can give the industry a regulatory regime that encourages productivity gains and diversification into new products from cane. Rebuilding the sugar industry will not happen overnight, but we must get to work, and we must get to work on the reforms as soon as possible.