



Speech by

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RURAL WATER USE EFFICIENCY INITIATIVE IRRIGATION AWARDS

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (2.30 a.m.): Tonight I bring a good news story about initiative, innovation and invention. In February of this year the Minister for Natural Resources, Stephen Robertson, and I had the opportunity to undertake a farm tour to see for ourselves the positive outcomes being achieved in the cane industry by winners of the Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative Irrigation Awards. Our first stop for the day was at the farm of Lethebrook grower Ian Cowan. Ian uses a combination of laser levelling, green trash blanketing and instruments called tensiometers which measure moisture content in the soil to reduce run-off and determine optimal irrigation practices. Kelsy Creek cane grower, Doug Lee, a winner of the inaugural Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative Irrigation Award in 2001, uses an innovative low pressure irrigation boom in conjunction with tensiometers to ensure that every drop of water applied to his crop is used to grow cane. Doug is a self-professed computer nut who records every possible variable affecting his crop and uses his computer to crunch the numbers, thereby ensuring that his money and effort are directed to the most profitable ends.

Crystalbrook canegrower Mark Orr has also installed a system of tensiometers to measure soil moisture content and, through a process in which stalk growth is carefully measured, Mark is able to finetune his irrigation efforts to limit water wastage. Like other growers we visited in the Proserpine area, Mark has installed tailings dams which are placed at the lowest drainage points around the farm. These dams serve to collect any run-off that may occur following irrigation, thereby both conserving water and preventing nutrient rich run-off from entering the waterways. This relatively simple and inexpensive innovation goes a long way to ensuring the ultimate quality of water that flows from the land into the nearby reef lagoon.

I was also impressed to learn that local growers are experimenting with the planting of soya bean on a rotational basis with sugar cane. The jury is still out on the ultimate profitability of this cropping technique, but we do know that this type of legume fixes nitrogen into the soil, thereby reducing the need to apply topical fertiliser. This has got to be a win-win result for both the grower and the environment.

The Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative is having great results in the cane industry thanks largely to the preparedness of cane growers to think outside the square. I must also mention the contribution of irrigation development officers Christine Peterson and Errol Sander and Local Management Group Chairperson Gary Considine who work hard to support the growers in their endeavours. Finally, I want to mention and congratulate fellow 2002 RWUE irrigator award winner Stephen Fordyce who accompanied us on the farm tour and thank grower Reg Muller for his hospitality on the day. I know that the minister was as impressed as I was with the positive outcomes being achieved and the progressive, can-do attitudes we encountered in the Proserpine cane growing area.