



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 29 April 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sugar Industry

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.36 a.m.): Today we get on with the job of delivering a future to Queensland's sugar industry. The House has passed historic reforms that have freed up the industry to innovation and value adding. This is in line with our election commitment. I congratulate the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries, Henry Palaszcuk, on the success of the bill. Within minutes of its passage Mr Palaszcuk and State Development and Innovation Minister, Tony McGrady, signed off on the first grant from the government package which, with the addition of \$3 million from the Department of Primary Industries last week, is now worth \$33 million. The money is already starting to flow, as we promised it would.

I thank Ministers Palaszcuk and McGrady. I also thank the former minister, Tom Barton, for the work he did. As I said, the money, as promised, is now starting to flow. \$20,600 has been awarded to the Plane Creek Cane Protection and Productivity Board to develop options on how to increase harvesting productivity and efficiency in the Plane Creek mill area near Mackay. It has already been done. The board gets half its funding from CSR Plane Creek mill and half from the growers who supply cane to the mill. The board's aim is to enhance productivity in the Plane Creek mill area by providing agronomic advice and services. The funding builds on other assistance the government has given to the industry in the Mackay-Proserpine area.

We have also provided close to \$1 million throughout the industry in grants over the past few months for projects ranging from engineering design of the furfural project at the Proserpine mill to the development of airborne imagery and industry development tools at Mackay. I know that the member for Whitsunday and the member for Mackay will be particularly delighted. The member for Mackay is always delighted.

The industry and government continue to investigate several projects to reduce the industry's reliance on the vagaries of global raw sugar prices. Sugar resource officers have been on the ground for more than a year. We are working with industry to help make it globally competitive.

I also welcome the federal government's commitment to provide further support beyond the \$150 million package agreed to by our governments in our September 2002 agreement. The free trade agreement with the United States was the mother of all let-downs for the sugar industry, which had hoped to gain more than \$75 million in the last year rising to \$344 million in year 8 under the agreement. So this extra funding is the least Canberra can do. I note Mr Howard's comments on ABC Radio yesterday that this new package is in no way conditional on further contribution from the Queensland government, even though we have now provided an extra \$3 million.

The industry is now ready to move forward to embrace new practices, new ideas and new products. If it continues to work with government, the industry will have a future as a mainstay of regional communities and a great symbol of Queensland. Without the reforms passed by this parliament, money allocated by the federal government or even the state government would not be effective. Our reforms were fundamentally important to make sure that not only was our \$33 million effective but so too was the money allocated by the Commonwealth.

Mr Mackenroth: They get all their money from the levy.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right. In fact, the money coming from the Commonwealth is largely coming from a levy which has been paid by all Australians.