



Speech by

Hon. Ken Hayward

MEMBER FOR KALLANGUR

Hansard Tuesday, 6 March 2007

PLANT PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (2.59 pm): The purpose of the Plant Protection Amendment Bill 2007 is twofold: to put in place an amendment to allow the chief executive of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries to amend declarations of approved sugar cane varieties as required and, secondly—and this will be the nature of much of the debate here today—to allow Bundaberg growers to plant sugarcane smut-susceptible varieties this March.

Dr David Watson, whom most of us in this parliament know, presented his report, titled *Economic Impact of Sugarcane Smut on the Queensland Sugarcane Industry* to the minister on 18 February 2007. Through the minister the Queensland government will now consider the Watson report's recommendations in full. It is important to understand that the minister said that scientific opinion is that it is no longer possible to prevent or control the spread of smut. It is important to understand that the government's policy position has changed from disease eradication—and I will come back to that with regard to the Watson report—to economic recovery and biosecurity safeguards. Of course, the government is broadly supportive of the Watson report and will consult with industry stakeholders in determining future government financial investment for the management of smut.

As the Watson report stated—and I think clearly recognised—by allowing growers to plant the non-resistant variety in the coming weeks there is a window of opportunity in March which will provide them with some economic advantage. Dr Watson recommended that the government urgently consider augmenting industry research and plant breeding activities to increase the variety and availability of smut-resistant cane.

The department is consulting with industry and research providers to explore options to effectively invest funds to introduce the recommendations of Dr Watson. The important thing about those recommendations is to facilitate industry recovery. Importantly, the department will engage industry to ensure self-determination processes are in place regionally to realise industry's and government's long-term plans for smut management. Again, that recognises what the minister has previously said when it comes to scientific opinion on the spread of smut.

In the longer term, the department will work with industry to undertake a comprehensive review of key biosecurity legislation over the next 12 to 18 months. The department clearly recognises, as I think the shadow minister was saying, the urgency of the situation and the circumstances. By amending the act the sugar industry can have planning certainty. Regions will be able to plan and plant the best options for their climate and soil types given limitations of supply of smut-resistant varieties. The Watson report recommends that each production region develop a regional smut management plan. These plans will be the best approach to the management of smut at a regional level. From my understanding, most growers reported to Dr Watson that they were in favour of planting smut-resistant varieties over the next few years. Through that, the Queensland government is enabling the regional sugar industry in pest quarantine area 5 to get on with the business and minimise the financial impacts of this disease, again as recommended by Dr Watson. The industry must increase the range and availability of smut-resistant cane varieties and improve smut management information with appropriate decision support tools for epidemiology, on-farm surveillance and farming systems practices. I support the bill.