



Speech by

**Ted Malone**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

Hansard Wednesday, 23 May 2007

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## **PRIMARY INDUSTRIES ACTS AMENDMENT AND REPEAL BILL**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (4.25 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on the Primary Industries Acts Amendment and Repeal Bill 2007. Firstly, I point out that I will speak briefly to the bill. I congratulate the shadow minister and the member for Hinchinbrook on the comprehensive nature of their speeches with regard to the sugar and banana industries. The time constraints are fairly important tonight because I believe there is a function on later this evening.

It is a reasonably pedestrian and mechanical piece of legislation. The opposition will be supporting the bill. The sugar industry supports the bill. As the minister knows, the electorate I represent in this parliament is largely primary industry based, in particular the sugar industry. It is incumbent on us to have a reasonable understanding of what is happening in the industry.

The mainstay of the legislation is the Sugar Industry Commissioner. The downgrading of that position has come about because of the mechanical aspects of the deregulation of the sugar industry over a period of time. It is only natural that that position be downgraded. Rowena McNally has done a magnificent job over a lot of years with Queensland Sugar Ltd. The position and the way in which it is being funded is changing dramatically.

My partner in crime the member for Hinchinbrook comprehensively covered the issues relating to the banana industry. I certainly will not speak about that industry at all. I commend his speech to the House.

Over the years there have been a great number of threats to the sugar industry. The industry has moved through those and come out the other side in a reasonably healthy condition. When we look back at history we wonder how it has been able to do that. It has mechanically harvested through droughts, floods and fires et cetera. The industry has been maintained through some difficult times. There were times when the industry feared for the future.

We are currently facing one of the biggest threats—that is, the incursion of smut into the Queensland industry. Even though it is easy to stand in the House now and say that it was inevitable that smut would invade the sugar fields of Queensland, I think every farmer in Queensland was hopeful that it would never happen. When it first showed its head in Bundaberg most farmers throughout the state basically hoped that it would not move out of the fields of Bundaberg. In their heart of hearts they knew that that was going to happen sooner or later.

The way the industry dealt with that situation is no different to the way it dealt with the other challenges it had before it. We pulled our socks up and moved forward. The challenge for the industry right now is to breed resistant varieties so that it can move through this challenge. The challenge we have is to move through this and get out the other side without any great loss of farmers and infrastructure.

When the smut fully takes hold it will result in significant loss to the industry. It is beholden on the research people—with funding from the state government—to breed new varieties that are resistant to the smut disease as quickly as possible. We have very few varieties that we are currently able to plant. They do not necessarily meet the production quality of the varieties that we currently have that are smut

susceptible. The industry is going to take a hit in the short term and the cost to the industry of replanting large areas with resistant varieties will be huge. We have to get those resistant varieties in the ground, and the sooner we do that the better off we will be.

The other issue I want to raise briefly is that the sugar industry is a community based industry. The small communities in the Mirani electorate, the Hinchinbrook electorate, the Mackay electorate and many other electorates are community based and the shire councils do a magnificent job in terms of making the industry work better. Sugar cane is a low-priced, high-mass product and therefore has to be moved over council roads, farm roads et cetera. It is moved in large amounts. Most harvesters operate at around 100,000 tonne or 150,000 tonne of cane a year. As I said, that cane has to be hauled over council roads.

Quite often it is incumbent on the councils to grade those roads a number of times a year. If the headquarters of the council are 100, 150 or even 200 kilometres away and a farmer calls their local councillor and says, for example, that Turnors Paddock Road or some other road needs a grader over it and that grader has to travel 100 kilometres to do it, the chances of that happening are pretty remote. The challenge will be for the industry in many ways to move through this amalgamation of councils without getting seriously hurt. With regard to rates, any increase in charges to farming operations has a huge impact on the economic viability of our operations in the canefields. With those few words and in support of the speech made by the shadow minister in the House this afternoon, I commend the bill to the House.