



Speech by

Hon. Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Tuesday, 20 February 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sugarcane Smut

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (9.55 am): I have received, along with my colleague the minister for state development, John Mickel, a report on the economic impact of sugarcane smut on the Queensland sugar cane industry by Dr David Watson. I now table that report.

Tabled paper: Report, dated 18 February 2007, by Dr David Watson titled 'The Economic Impact of Sugarcane Smut on the Queensland Sugarcane Industry—Final Report'.

Dr Watson has provided a thorough independent assessment of the impact of the disease on the sugar industry and made a number of important recommendations to facilitate economic recovery. The report was commissioned in November last year when it became clear that cane smut was widespread and established and that it was no longer possible to prevent or control its spread. The Queensland government moved from a containment and eradication approach to a long-term economic management approach, driven largely by industry, hand in hand with Canegrowers and BSES.

After studying the report, I am pleased to inform the House that the impact of sugarcane smut is not as great as was initially expected. The report contains a number of recommendations, including that normal planting should continue uninterrupted; that the industry should replace smut-susceptible varieties with smut-resistant varieties during their normal cycle; that decisions relating to the approved variety lists for planting should be made on the basis of consultation with and advice from BSES and industry in each of Queensland's six pest quarantine areas; and that the government should increase its input into research and the breeding of smut-resistant varieties of cane.

Concurrently, the government will also move an amendment to the Plant Protection Act to ensure that the recommendations contained within the Watson report can be implemented. In the longer term, the integrity of Queensland's biosecurity legislation will be assured by a comprehensive review, involving industry, to be completed by June 2008.

The Watson report has been considered by my cabinet colleagues, who, in endorsing the recommendations, have reiterated this government's commitment to a multibillion-dollar industry. This is in stark contrast to a federal government that has turned its back on growers. I would like to congratulate Dr Watson and his working group on this report. I commend the report to the House.