




Speech by

Jason Costigan

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard Wednesday, 31 October 2012

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: AGRICULTURE, RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

 **Mr COSTIGAN** (Whitsunday—LNP) (8.20 pm): I rise in the House as a member of the parliament's Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee and I wish to begin by thanking the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and their respective directors-general and staff, both ministerial and departmental, for their cooperation and professionalism during the estimates process. I reiterate what the member for Lockyer just said: it was quite clear that all three ministers had an excellent grasp of their respective portfolios. I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the professionalism and fine work of the secretariat, headed by Mr Robert Hansen. It would be remiss of me not to thank all members of the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee under the chairmanship of the member for Lockyer.

Personally, I thought the highlight of the estimates process was the fact that we had questions being asked of a minister of a stand-alone agriculture department. This was in stark contrast to what happened previously at estimates when the Australian Labor Party were running the show. Let us not forget that it was Labor who dumbed down primary industries in Queensland. The former DPI, which was a world-class department from years gone by, was effectively dismantled—in fact, ripped apart—and put in ruin by the previous Labor administration.

As the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry would be well aware—and I have seen the member for Hinchinbrook interjecting in here, backing me up—along with other regional MPs, such as the members for Burdekin, Mirani, Bundaberg and Burnett, the mighty sugar industry is one of Queensland's great primary industries. In fact, it is worth about \$1.2 billion annually. As I have mentioned before in this place, the sugar industry has underpinned the economy of the Mackay-Whitsunday region since our early days of European settlement, and ditto other regional communities around Queensland, like the Herbert, the Burdekin and Bundaberg.

Even after the rationalisation of the sugar industry in my home town of Mackay in the late eighties, sugar is still a big economic driver in my region, so much so that within 90 minutes of Mackay we still have five mills, a refinery, an ethanol plant, a co-generation plant and a large bulk sugar terminal at the port of Mackay which at one stage was reputed to be the biggest in the world.

With that in mind, I was delighted to join the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, alongside the Premier and the member for Mirani, on Mackay's outskirts on 27 September 2012 for the signing of a memorandum of understanding in relation to the government's additional \$4.6 million for sugar research. This historic occasion took place on the grounds of the BSES experiment station at Te Kowai, with the BSES represented by chairman, Paul Wright. He joined the minister in the signing of this very important document, which I might add honours a pre-election commitment made by the now Premier while standing alongside people such as me in cane fields not far from nearby Walkerston. Also in attendance for this signing were the following: Peter Allsopp of BSES and many of the wonderfully talented

people from that organisation; Alf Cristaudo, the chairman of Canegrowers Queensland; Paul Schembri, the chairman of Canegrowers Mackay and the man we call Mr Sugar in our part of the world; and representatives of the Australian Cane Farmers Association, namely Don Murday and Stephen Fordyce. It was also terrific to see millers in attendance, with Mackay Sugar chairman, Andrew Cappello, and chief executive officer, Quinton Hildebrand, both on hand. I candidly remarked to the latter that I always have two teaspoons of sugar in my coffee—one for Farleigh and one for Prossie. I have said this a couple of times. It is a little cheeky perhaps, given that Proserpine Mill is actually owned by Sucrogen and not Mackay Sugar.

Mr Cripps: Ha, ha!

Mr COSTIGAN: Putting those rivalries aside—and I take the humour being displayed by the member for Hinchinbrook, who is one of the aforementioned ministers—this \$4.6 million package is good news for sugar and good news for communities such as Mackay and the Whitsundays, given that our communities would not be where they are today without sugar. Furthermore, this package will go some way to fulfilling the government's commitment to doubling agricultural food production by 2040.

As government members would know—in fact, they are probably saying it in their sleep by now—it is part of our four-pillar approach to fixing the Queensland economy after that terrible damage inflicted by two decades of Labor. I might point out that this \$4.6 million in extra funding for R&D will eventually flow on to Sugar Research Australia, that new entity that is being put together after growers and millers voted overwhelmingly to get with the times and have one single body. I think the ministers handled themselves superbly during the estimates process and we are well and truly getting sugar back on the map.

(Time expired)