

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 1065
Asked on 28 September 2004

MR MULHERIN asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (Mr Palaszczuk)—

QUESTION:

Does his department support the application for exceptional circumstances assistance on behalf of Mackay and central coast region cane growers?

ANSWER:

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) and I have consistently supported the Mackay and Central Coast Canegrowers' application for exceptional circumstances (EC).

All producers were included in the original EC application, however, unfortunately only beef and dairy producers were granted full EC on 12 January 2004. The Commonwealth also had previously refused EC support to approximately forty canegrowers in the Broadsound area of the Central Coast region.

The Commonwealth initially indicated it would reconsider the case for all these sugar producers 'if the situation did not improve after the current summer rainfall season'. Following discussions between Canegrowers and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and the submission of data outlining sugar cane stool death due to drought in the region, DAFF indicated that the National Rural Adjustment Committee (NRAC) would be prepared to reconsider its decision.

DAFF again requested additional information on the expected yield of this year's crop. This information was sent to Canberra and on 2 July 2004, yet again, it was unsuccessful.

The Commonwealth announced that NRAC had recommended that the entire area did not meet the criteria for declaration of EC however, they did recommend that with additional information, a case could be made for a small area within this region. Canegrowers recently submitted the requested additional data on cane stool death and I have again sent a letter to the Honourable Warren Truss, MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, on 1 October 2004 stating my strong support for the application and asking for his positive consideration of this application.

I believe the swift consideration of this new data by NRAC should be a priority for the Federal Agriculture Minister.