

LOWER BURDEKIN INITIATIVE MEETING

TOWNSVILLE

TUESDAY 26TH MARCH, 2002.

ADDRESS BY GEORGE NIELSON

(representing Burdekin Canegrowers and the North Burdekin Water Board):

George's address responded to the question "*What do we really need to do to implement integrated water management practices that ensure the long term economic viability of the Lower Burdekin?*" from a sugar industry perspective.

George opened his address by stating that any comments were not meant to be defensive – we need to put a positive spin on what we are doing in the Burdekin.

Points made –

- South and North Burdekin Water Boards cover farms in the Delta.
- Area has been successfully growing cane.
- Farmers acknowledge they have made mistakes in the past.
- Some areas that have been growing cane shouldn't be. However, the point is those areas are being farmed, and the system has allowed the farmers to do so.
- This raises the question - should they be allowed to stay there? If society or system says they can't, then what about compensation?
- The question poses a real issue for families involved, who have invested into the areas.

- The North and South Burdekin Water Boards are a positive story for the Burdekin. Founded in mid 60's.
- Acknowledgement of those people who were involved and had the foresight to look at what was happening in the environment and with water issues, and recognised that there was a potential problem with salt water intrusion from the ocean. Steps were taken to address that issue. Funding was and still is being provided from local growers and millers.

- World needs to be fed – without irrigation that would be impossible.
- There is a view that a man is the king of the castle if he has a piece of paper that gives him title to a piece of land. Another view is that we are holding title to the land in trust for our future generations. However, majority of farmers hold the latter view.

- The Burdekin Sugar industry, through Canegrowers and the Water Boards, is very happy and proud to be involved in this Lower Burdekin Initiative.
- We acknowledge we need a better understanding of our system - our Delta aquifer, and our farming systems and impacts of irrigation on the environment.
- Need to remember that irrigation for agriculture is essential for the feeding of the World, but we need to understand the effects of it to preserve the environment for future generations.
- We don't want to pollute groundwater with nitrate, or Atrazine or anything else, because we live in the area and drink the water. Therefore we are vitally interested in the impacts we are having on the system and the environment.

- There has been criticism directed lately at the sugar industry – for the impact caused by farming on the Great Barrier Reef. We need to know what, if any, impacts we are having and how we can address those issues.
- The Water Boards and Canegrowers have been very happy to be associated with the LBI – has been a very positive thing for us to see all the researchers working together, sharing sites, equipment and findings.
- Growers have a vital interest in the results of our farming activities.
- Challenge is to see that the work is completed.
- Some have concerns that money will run out before the job is finished. Lot of work already done – but a lot more still to be done.
- Happy about starting to develop groundwater models.
- Concerns about where that is heading, but want to see the model come to fruition. Acknowledge that this is a long term project.
- Valuable tool in the future for the management of the aquifer in the Delta.
- Need to preserve that aquifer into the future.
- Problem – lot of research done in the past has not been adopted. How do we address the question of adoption of research findings?
- Issue could be economic – if you can identify value in adopting the research findings, change will be adopted quickly. If you can't identify economic value, people tend to resist change.
- Growers are able to recognise and accept good science.
- However, there seems to be problem in that area as well – think it is tied in with the way funding flows these days.
- Sometimes science is credible with an honest finding and people accept it. Sometimes it is portrayed in a way that is geared towards attracting more funding.
- How do we address this issue?
- Have had some communication problems in the past between some of the researchers. However, generally there has been positive outcome from this initiative with issues being addressed at meetings.
- Biggest impact we have had in the complete Delta of the Lower Burdekin is "post the DAM". Pre the dam, water supply was restricted to the flow in the river.
- Since the Dam and the area has expanded, there has been plenty of water in the Burdekin. This has created a different set of problems with a different set of management criteria for the irrigated areas.

These are issues being picked up by this Lower Burdekin Initiative, and need to be addressed into the future.