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## MOSSMAN TO BURDEKIN CANE-GROWING COMMUNITIES COUNT THE COST OF MONSOONAL DRENCHING



**Energy Minister told of Mackay irrigators' power price problem**



**A tale of two summers: As the north floods, the south prays for rain**



**Grower anger at plans to resume cane land for new road**

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Mark, Burdekin



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11 February 2019



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COVER IMAGE: There has been widespread flooding in Queensland's northern cane growing regions. Read more on page 12.

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# The fickleness of weather

By Paul Schembri, Chairman CANEGROWERS

The celebrated American author **Mark Twain** is credited with saying, "Climate is what we expect – weather is what we get". How true! We can hope for the best climate but ultimately what we get is the weather.

The sugar industry stretches almost 2,500 km of Australia's coastline, so the variability of weather is something we understand quite well. Often regions separated by no more than a few hundred kilometres can simultaneously be facing floods and drought.

That scenario is currently playing itself out in the cane fields of Queensland.

The northern region has had a drenching with records being broken in some locations. There has been damage to crops and infrastructure but it is too early to assess the full extent of it.

Townsville and the cane areas of the Herbert River and the Burdekin have been particularly impacted and the thoughts of the entire industry are with those communities at this time.

The story south of Mackay is a different one. Bundaberg, Isis, Maryborough and Rocky Point have missed the rain.

Spare a thought for the southern growers who not only are witnessing their crops falter but are struggling to cope with murderous bills for electricity and purchasing water.

Seeing your crops failing and knowing you have plenty of water to save it but can't afford the electricity charges is hugely frustrating.

## Time for Unity and Action

Recently, I was in Canberra and had the opportunity to speak with **Fiona Simson**, President of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF).

Fiona is a NSW mixed farmer who has done a great job of standing up for Australian farmers in particularly difficult times.

At the same time I was in Canberra, anti-farm group Aussie Farms released an online map identifying farms and properties where animals are located. This type of anti-farm activism is new to our sector.

Unfortunately, what it does highlight is that despite all our programs, media and strategies to promote agriculture and the farming sector – we have a lot of work ahead of us to counter

these groups with extreme views and their efforts to rally action against us.

It seems that every agricultural pursuit and farm activity is under attack. Sugar faces scrutiny for farming practices near the Great Barrier Reef and links to obesity; cotton is under pressure over water access; live cattle and sheep exports have been demonised; the chicken industry is heavily scrutinised; graziers can't clear vegetation; fishing and forestry are heavily regulated. On top of that we now have animal activists entering private land and encouraging others to do the same.

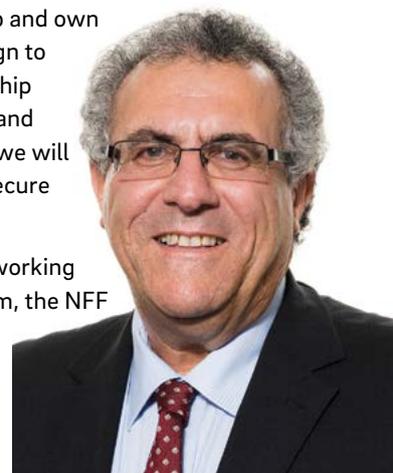
As a farm sector we have to make a stand! Out of adversity can come opportunity. As cane growers we need to look beyond the farm gate and be part of a larger influencing force.

Political parties will take us some way on the journey but not all the way. Farmers are best when farmers fight for farmers. The NFF is well placed to lead this cause. In difficult times the NFF has stood up to reshape the perceptions of the farming sector.

Clearly what we are doing now is not getting us far enough. It is not beyond the character and capacity of our farm organisations to come together and stand shoulder to shoulder with all farmers.

Unless we develop and own a national campaign to reset the relationship between farmers and the community – we will have a less than secure future.

I am sure that by working together with them, the NFF are well placed to develop a strategy to secure the future for the farming sector. ■



*"Often regions separated by no more than a few hundred kilometres can simultaneously be facing floods and drought."*

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**Contact your local CANEGROWERS Office to discover how WE CAN HELP YOU!**

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## Minister told of farm power problems

Federal Energy Minister Angus Taylor heard first hand of the financial pressure soaring power bills are placing on irrigators during a recent visit to a cane farm in the Mackay region.

CANEGROWERS Mackay Chairman **Kevin Borg** told the minister that power prices had jumped by more than 130% in recent years, with some irrigators now facing bills in excess of \$30,000 per year.

"The monopoly enjoyed by Ergon in supplying rural businesses in the Mackay and Plane Creek districts means that farmers are stymied as far as negotiating a competitive price or enjoying the benefits of being a valued customer," Mr Borg said.

"This lack of choice is something which we have brought to the attention of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and we have called for its Retail Price Inquiry recommendations (released in July 2018) to be implemented in full."

In the meantime, farmers had no choice but to "suck it up or do without irrigation," he said.

"Some people might argue that in a rainy place like Mackay irrigation shouldn't be necessary, but the fact is that an

unirrigated crop which has not received sufficient water at the right times in the growing season yields less cane and less sugar. Consequently, Australia ultimately pays the price by having less sugar to sell on valuable export markets."

Mr Borg said a major component of growers' electricity bills is for network charges (40%) which includes alleviating network congestion, something CANEGROWERS' research has shown is not a problem in most regional areas.

"With spare capacity in regional networks, irrigators are paying for something which they do not need (new capacity)," he said.

"CANEGROWERS is calling for an efficient network charge of no more than 8c/kWh in recognition that agricultural production occurs in uncongested parts of the network." ■

*Pictured: Energy Minister Angus Taylor speaks to local media in Mackay alongside CANEGROWERS Mackay Chairman Kevin Borg and Director Joseph Borg (green shirt).*



## NFF WELCOMES FARM DEBT MEDIATION SCHEME

The National Farmers' Federation has welcomed the Federal Government's commitment to establish a National Farm Debt Mediation Scheme as part of its response to recommendations from the Banking Royal Commission.

The government also endorsed recommendations by Royal Commissioner Justice **Kenneth Hayne** to give special consideration to distressed agricultural loans.

"The Royal Commission shone a bright light on Australia's banking sector, on which Australian farmers are heavily dependent," NFF President **Fiona Simson** said. "Justice Hayne's recommendations and the Government's affirmative response, recognised the unique situations farm businesses often face and the always unequal playing field when negotiating with the big banks."

Ms Simson said the NFF had been advocating for a National Farm Debt Mediation Scheme for some years.

"The chance to refer a challenged farm loan to mediation represents a greatly enhanced chance to reach an outcome that is fair and equitable for all involved," she said.

Queensland has had a farm debt mediation scheme since July 2017. Mediation is required before mortgagees can take possession of a property under a farm mortgage and the state scheme is administered by the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority. ■

## WOMEN IN SUGAR CONFERENCE

The Women in Sugar Herbert group invites women from across the sugarcane industry to join them at the Tyto Conference Centre in Ingham at the end of April.

A two day conference across 29-30 April will feature guest speakers, a gala dinner and bus tour of the district.

A registration form will be included in the next edition of *Australian Canegrower* or to obtain one now, email [rlbonassi@bigpond.com](mailto:rlbonassi@bigpond.com) ■



## Tale of two summers

Official Bureau of Meteorology statistics for January reveal a tale of two very different summers for Queensland's sugarcane growing regions – very wet in the north and very dry in the south.

Everywhere was hot, with temperatures 2.46 degrees above the long-term average, and overall the state was down 25% of its average January rainfall.

However, all of the northern cane growing regions had above average rainfall thanks to Cyclone Penny and the arrival of the monsoonal system, which was to linger for weeks and inundate Townsville along with hundreds of hectares of sugarcane (see articles from page 12).

The Meringa Sugar Research Australia station made the list of record highest daily rainfall totals with 494 mm on 29 January breaking a previous record of 375 mm set in 1998.

The Mulgrave Mill official rain gauge recorded its highest January rainfall since 1953 of 840 mm for the month.

Proserpine recorded 503 mm, well above its January average of 297 mm but from there south, all of the sugarcane regions had a dry start to 2019.

Mackay airport recorded 221 mm in January, well below the gauge's average for the month of 307.8 mm. Bundaberg had 6.8mm when its average is 171.4 mm and Maryborough recorded 6.8 mm compared to a January average of 162.8 mm.

Further south in Rocky Point the picture was even more dire, with growers receiving practically no rain from mid-October to the end of January.

"We're in the middle of a very severe drought," CANEGROWERS Rocky Point Chairman Richard Skopp said.

"We've got maybe 15mm over the last few days, but that's insignificant after almost four months of zero rain.

"It's as bad as I've ever seen it in more than 50 years of growing cane in this region. Only about 5% of the district has access to irrigation water, for the rest we're seeing crops wilt and even completely die off in some areas.

"If we don't get some significant rain very soon I estimate the crop will be down by half this year."

Looking ahead, the Bureau says the Pacific Ocean is currently at El Niño WATCH, meaning there is an elevated chance (50%) of El Niño developing during autumn 2019.

An El Niño event typically results in warmer and drier than usual conditions, and a later autumn break, for southern and eastern Australia. ■

*Pictured: While crops wilt and die in Rocky Point after four months of almost no rain, further north growers are starting the clean-up following severe flooding from the Burdekin to Mossman.*

# SHOCK AND ANGER

## GROWERS SLAM STATE GOVERNMENT OVER ROAD PLAN

by Wayne Griffin

Rocky Point growers have hit out at the State Government's lack of consultation over plans to resume cane land for an M1 duplication project.



Cane grower Mick Herse is not a happy man, and he's not alone.

On 15 January, Mick was one of a number of Rocky Point land owners to receive notification of the State Government's plan to resume farm land for the Coomera Connector corridor.

The proposed road, which will link Brisbane and the Gold Coast, relieving pressure on the heavily congested M1, will run through the centre of the Queensland's southernmost cane-growing district.

For Mick, his wife Tracey and father Ian, who still helps out on-farm, the news took them completely by surprise.

"We had the car all packed up ready to head to the Tamworth Country Music Festival, then the postie arrived with this registered letter from TMR (Dept of Transport and Main Roads) telling us they're taking a big chunk of the farm," Mick said.

"We didn't sleep very well for the first few nights down there in Tamworth. You'd just be lying there wondering what it meant for the farm, if there even would be a farm."

Not only had Mick and Tracey not been consulted on the proposed routing of a six-lane freeway through their Eagleby property, it was the first time they had even heard of the State Government's plan to build the road in the area.

"There was no consultation at all. Before this letter we had no contact from anybody at TMR," Mick said.

At only 74 hectares, Mick's farm is one of the smaller cane-growing operations in the district, but combined with a successful cane mulch business, it has provided a livelihood for five generations.

"It's a small operation, but it's still viable if we harvest our own cane and we do our bales and we're not employing anyone to work on the farm," Mick said.

"Last year we harvested 2,800 tonnes of cane and on an average year we'll do about 8,000 bales, which we supply locally from the border up as far as Toogoolawah."

However, Mick believes the proposed route of the Coomera Connector may render the farm non-viable.

"Basically the road is going to come through and take the front off two paddocks, cross a neighbour's property and then come straight through the middle of another cane paddock.

"We've only got two fresh water supplies on the farm and the road will come straight across them – we're losing them both."

Then there is the problem of access for harvesting equipment. With the six-lane freeway cutting through the centre of the farm, accessing paddocks on the river side of the property may not be possible, Ian said.



*"If they just took a strip off the top of the farm or a strip along the river, then a bloke would still be able to have a crack. But the way it is, they should have to compensate me for a loss of living for the next 30 years."*

"Because we're on flood land, they'll have to pile the freeway, but is it going to be high enough for us to get a harvester underneath?" Ian wondered.

The location of the farm on a floodplain of the Logan River means switching to an alternative farming system that doesn't require access for large farming machinery is also problematic.

"What are my options? I can't have livestock because the whole property floods and floods fast. If I was to go into small crops I'd still need access to fresh water, which I won't have. I can't get into prawn farming because of white spot," Mick said.

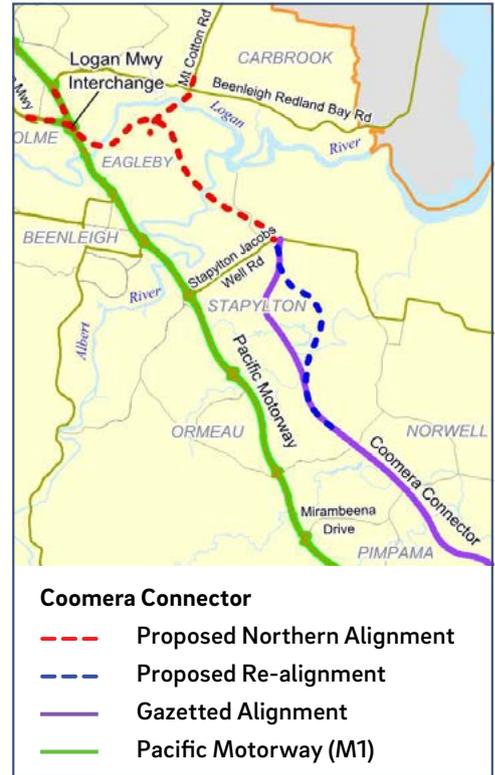
"Cane is one of the few things you can grow here that's not affected by flying-foxes, wood duck and other things like that, but without water or access that may not be viable either.

"I mean, if they just took a strip off the top of the farm or a strip along the river, then a bloke would still be able to have a crack.



*Pictured: (top) Mick and Tracey Herse were shocked to learn of State Government plans to resume approximately 8 hectares of their cane farm at Eagleby, south of Brisbane. The plan will see a six-lane highway cut through their property, causing access problems for harvesting and destroying the farm's only access to fresh water. (Above) Alberton grower Geoff Rossmann is disappointed at the State Government's handling of land acquisitions.*

*Continues page 8 ►*



"But the way it is, they should have to compensate me for a loss of living for the next 30 years."

While the newly proposed Eagleby section of the road has come as a shock to landholders in the area, across the Albert River in Stapylton and Norwell growers have been aware of the road project for many years.

Gazetted as the Intra Regional Transport Corridor, the proposed road has been a source of controversy for over 20 years, and even played a role in the downfall of **Wayne Goss'** Labor Government at the 1995 election.

"No government in the last 20 years has been game to say where the road was going to finally go, because there's koala issues," said Alberton grower **Geoff Rossmann**, who is slated to lose 3ha of cane land to the project.

"They tried running it through Mount Cotton 20-odd years ago and the Goss Government lost power because there was a big protest about going through the koala habitat with a major road.

"So, we knew that this was in the pipeline for a long time, but we'd no idea it was going to crop up now, and those other fellas over in Eagleby, they had no idea about a road going through their land at all."

In the late 90s grower representatives were involved in negotiating a route for the Intra Regional Transport Corridor that would have no impact on cane land, **CANEGROWERS Rocky Point Chairman Richard Skopp** said.

"We helped come up with a route that didn't impact on any farms.

"Then we didn't hear anything for about 15 or 20 years until we received this letter in the post telling us the northernmost section of the gazetted route had been changed and was now going through some cane farms," said Richard, who will lose 9 ha of leased cane land under the new route.

The change is due to the realisation that a large quarry had been dug out, 30 metres below sea level, on the original route.

While Geoff Rossmann is resigned to the fact he'll lose some land to the road project, he's not happy with how the land acquisitions are being handled.

"I'm disappointed in the way it's been handled. We've never heard a thing about compensation," he said.

"I'd have thought they would have approached the growers who are seriously impacted by this to discuss buying the land, instead of just sending a note saying we're taking it.

"In the letter it says it's going to be years away, but personally I think it's going to be an election issue, because the situation with the M1 is not sustainable. Every day it's at a standstill during peak times."

In a statement, TMR said Queensland's Transport Minister would consider feedback from affected land owners before land resumptions were finalised.

"The project is in the early planning phases and TMR is currently consulting with affected land owners on the section north of Stapylton that will connect with the Logan and Pacific Motorways. This will provide a local road connection to Beenleigh Redland Bay Road and Mount Cotton Road.

"Feedback from affected land owners will be considered by the Transport and Main Roads Minister, before the proposed northern extension to the Coomera Connector corridor being declared a future State-controlled road under the Transport Infrastructure Act 1994." ■

*Pictured: CANEGROWERS Rocky Point Chairman Richard Skopp said that proposed alterations to a previously agreed route will see some cane farms impacted.*

# PLENTY OF EVENTS ON OFFER FOR THE CANE INDUSTRY

The Australian cane industry is in the thick of the events season, with plenty of local events, field days and conferences happening in coming weeks and months.



SRA is among several organisations providing important updates on research and other activities, to ensure that growers and millers have access to the latest information to help them grow and mill Queensland's crop in the most productive, profitable, and sustainable way.

To find out more about what's coming up in your region, SRA has established an online industry event calendar at: [www.canecalendar.com.au](http://www.canecalendar.com.au).

This calendar is open to everyone in the industry to update their events. For more information, contact **Samantha Ryalls** at SRA via [sryalls@sugarresearch.com.au](mailto:sryalls@sugarresearch.com.au) or (07) 3331 3308.

Many of you would also receive updates on SRA activities via our regular e-newsletter. If you do not currently receive it, then you can subscribe via the "subscribe to updates" link on the SRA website or by emailing Samantha at [sryalls@sugarresearch.com.au](mailto:sryalls@sugarresearch.com.au).

You can also keep abreast of what's going on via the Sugar Research Australia Facebook page.

Some coming events include:

### **SRA grower research updates**

We invite you to join SRA researchers, technicians and adoption team staff to share the latest research developments in your region.

You will have the opportunity to speak directly with the people conducting the research. Dates have been confirmed for Southern Region (February 26), Herbert (April 2), Tully (April 3), Cairns (April 4), and Central Region (April 18).

Keep an eye on the SRA website for information about other regions and for more details.

### **Identifying and managing sugarcane diseases**

SRA is offering a two-day course in sugarcane pathology that will give you

a thorough understanding of diseases of Australian sugarcane. This course is targeted toward advisors.

This practical and hands-on course is on site at SRA's Woodford pathology research station, where you will have the chance to see these diseases in the field and learn from SRA's pathology team.

The course will also provide an opportunity to update you on the latest disease research, and will cover issues such as identification, diagnosis and management of important endemic and exotic diseases of sugarcane. See the SRA website for more information.

### **Milling research forums**

SRA and QUT are again planning milling research forums in March for the milling community.

Planning for these events is underway and the milling community will be notified of further details. ■

## QSL Marketing Choice Arrives in Mackay



By Greg Beashel  
QSL Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer

*"Mackay growers do not need to make any decisions regarding their QSL pricing and payment options at this early stage. Those growers who elect to use QSL as their marketer will be contacted by a QSL representative to discuss their pricing and payment options."*

QSL Marketing Choice is now available to Mackay growers supplying Mackay Sugar mills.

This development marks an important new era for this milling district. After nearly a century of QSL and its predecessors serving Mackay growers through their miller, the new Marketing Choice arrangements will enable them to deal directly with QSL from this coming season and choose from our full range of products and services.

### HOW THE NEW SYSTEM WORKS

In order to access QSL moving forward, growers supplying Mackay Sugar's Mackay mills must nominate QSL as a marketer of their Grower's Economic Interest in Sugar (GEI Sugar).

GEI Sugar is the grower's share of the sugar produced from their cane crop that they have traditionally received payment for, and includes both their export and domestic sugar tonnages.

Under Marketing Choice, the grower nominates who markets their GEI Sugar (i.e. sells it on their behalf and negotiates their premiums) and what percentage of their GEI Sugar they'd like to allocate to the marketer each season.

The grower can then decide which of that marketer's pricing and payment options they'd like to use for that allocated sugar.

Mackay growers do not need to make any decisions regarding their QSL pricing and payment options at this early stage. Those growers who elect to use QSL as their marketer will be contacted by a QSL representative to discuss their pricing and payment options.

It is important to note that marketing and pricing are intertwined – you cannot market with one marketer and price your sugar with a different one.

As such, Mackay growers can only access QSL's pricing and payment services, including the QSL Harvest Pool, for the GEI Sugar they allocate to us to market.

### WHAT MACKAY GROWERS NEED TO DO

Mackay growers should have recently received an information pack from QSL which includes their GEI Sugar Marketer Nomination form, which must be submitted by **Tuesday 5 March 2019** in order to elect their chosen marketer/s for the 2019 Season.

This form asks growers to nominate which marketer/s they'd like to use for the 2019, 2020 and 2021 seasons, and what percentage of their GEI Sugar they'd like to allocate to them each season.

For example, if you only wanted to use QSL as your marketer, you would allocate 100% of your GEI Sugar to QSL for each of the 2019, 2020 and 2021 seasons.

If you make no choice or do not allocate 100% of your GEI Sugar for the 2019 Season, any unallocated sugar will default to QCS to market. **So, for a Mackay grower to do nothing is to choose QCS for marketing and pricing services.**

If you want to use QSL for the coming season, we ask that you return your completed GEI Sugar Marketer Nomination form to QSL in the reply-paid envelope provided as soon as possible.

Once we've received this, we'll be in touch to get you set up in the QSL system and explain your QSL pricing and payment options.

### ARRANGEMENTS FOR MOSSMAN GROWERS

The planned sale of Mossman Mill means that the Marketing Choice arrangements above do not currently extend to growers supplying Mossman Mill. However, QSL is working with representatives of Far Northern Milling Pty Ltd and will release further details around our marketing arrangements in this district as soon as the sale of the mill is finalised.



## Got questions? Come to an info session

QSL will host a series of information sessions to explain the new QSL Marketing Choice process now in place for growers supplying Mackay Sugar's Mackay mills. Session details are:

WHEN	VENUE
9.30am Monday 11 February	Wests Leagues Club, Walkerston
1pm Monday 11 February	Eton Rural Fire Shed, Eton
4pm Monday 11 February	Marian Rural Fire Shed, Marian
9.30am Tuesday 12 February	Finch Hatton Hall, Final Hatton
1pm Tuesday 12 February	Kuttabul Rural Fire Shed, Kuttabul
9.30am Wednesday 13 February	Farview Tavern, Farleigh
1pm Wednesday 13 February	St Helens Bowls Club, Calen

## The QSL difference

Marketing with QSL means that you're banding together with growers and millers throughout our state to capture economies of scale and other benefits just not available to smaller marketers. As Australia's largest and most experienced sugar marketer, QSL offers Mackay growers significant advantages to QCS:

- We're a substantial, highly respected marketer with an **established track record of strong returns**.
- Our not-for-profit, no-margin framework and income-tax-exempt status helps us **minimise costs**.
- We enjoy **lower interest rates** and pricing execution costs than QCS.
- Our **state-wide supply footprint** helps manage local weather & production risks that could impact sales.
- Our unsurpassed combined storage capacity across all six of Qld's bulk sugar terminals means we have **more shipping and storage options** than QCS and use these to maximise returns.



- We're **committed to transparency** and not only publicly share our pricing results and payment schedule, but provide very detailed information about how we operate each of our pricing products.
- Our growers have the **freedom to choose from multiple pricing and payment options**.

*Disclaimer: This update contains information of a general nature only and should not be regarded as comprehensive or complete. Please note that QSL does not provide financial or investment advice to growers in relation to pool selection or pricing decisions. Growers should seek their own financial advice and read the QSL Pricing Pool Terms in full which can be found on QSL's website. Nothing contained in this update should be relied upon as a representation as to future matters. Information about past performance is not an indication of future performance. QSL does not accept any responsibility to any person for the decisions and actions taken by that person with respect to any of the information contained in this update.*



# Farms flood in monsoon deluge



While the eyes of Australia were on Townsville flooding after days of heavy rain, in the nearby Burdekin and Herbert River regions hundreds of hectares of sugarcane were also being inundated.

CANEGROWERS Policy Council member **Steve Pilla** said the impact of the rain across the entire Burdekin included lodged cane, water erosion and loss of irrigation infrastructure including pumps.

The Houghton River broke its banks and inundated the small town of Giru, Wilmar's Invicta Mill and surrounding farms.

Giru grower **Gary Stockham** said the wind and rain had flattened a lot of cane.

"The main thing for us is the riverbank wash, it takes all the fluming away and digs big holes that have got to be repaired and there's a couple of feet of silt in the

bottom ends of the paddocks so that's holding water in a few places," he told *Australian Canegrower* late last week.

"Usually we get a flood and it's up for a few hours but at Giru this has been going for more than a week, it rains every day and the water has come over the bank and gone back a few times.

"Normally we don't see rain go on for this long, so growers will be worried that we've not had sunlight for almost two weeks."

One benefit Gary can see from the flood is the recharge of underground water reserves.



*"We've not really had a flood since 2010-2011 so underground was getting pretty dry and a bit of salt was coming in, but this has been up for so long it'll give it a flush and fill it up – so there is some good in it."*

*Pictured: flooding in the Giru area.*

"We've not really had a flood since 2010-2011 so underground was getting pretty dry and a bit of salt was coming in, but this has been up for so long it'll give it a flush and fill it up – so there is some good in it," he said.

The Burdekin River was expected to exceed 10.5 metres at the Inkerman Bridge by Thursday.

The Burdekin Falls Dam started spilling on 31 January. In the Tableland region the Tinaroo Dam reached capacity and started spilling on 3 February.

In the Herbert River district, farm gauges have recorded more than 2300mm since the start of December.

Growers with insurance policies through CANEGROWERS can contact their local representative at any time for assistance with claims.

CANEGROWERS Insurance has been able to secure emergency payments for a number of clients. ■



# LIKE NOTHING I'VE EVER SEEN BEFORE

by Wayne Griffin

## Mossman growers count the clean-up costs after monsoonal rain brings worst flooding in more than 20 years.

After almost 80 years living and working on a cane farm at Miallo in Queensland's World Heritage Wet Tropic, Tano Caltabiano has seen his fair share of rain.

But in all those years he had never see anything like the deluge in late January that caused creeks and rivers around the Mossman area to burst their

banks, swamping farms and damaging headlands and farm infrastructure.

"I've been here all my life, I was born and bred here, and I've never seen the river bust its banks and gouge it out like this - never," Tano said. "I've had washouts around the farm, but not where it busted the banks."

More than a metre of rain fell in the region over the last week in December, saturating the ground and filling waterways.

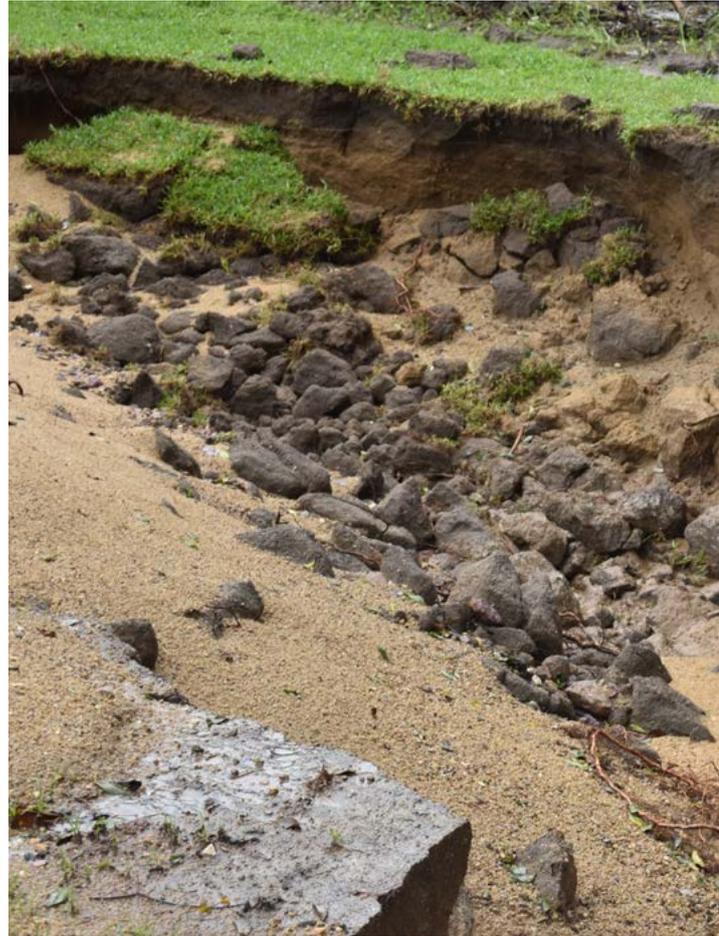
Regular rainfall over the following weeks ensured water table remained topped up, so when 500mm fell in the space of 24 hours on 26-27 January, creeks and rivers rose more rapidly than expected.

"It wasn't a record flood, we had a bigger flood in '96, but it just came down so fast. It must have been a lot of rain, because it just galloped down, it pulled trees out and everything," Tano said.

"A lot of people up in the Daintree got caught, it washed about 250 head of cattle out to sea. Some of them got stuck in the mangroves - poor buggers - and the people couldn't get to them.

"They were hoping they'd get another flood to wash them out, but it hasn't happened so they'd probably be all dead by now."

While Tano has lost some cane, most of the damage has been to his headlands and the river bank.





*"It ripped the cane out of the ground in places – pulled the roots out. I don't know if it'll die when I cut it, maybe it won't ratoon. But the biggest damage is the big gouge out of the river bank, that could cost me \$15,000 to fix."*

*Pictured: Mossman growers Tano Caltabiano (left) and Gerard Puglisi (above) suffered damage to cane paddocks, creek banks, headlands and other farm infrastructure when waterways in the Miallo area burst their banks.*

"I've haven't lost too much cane, maybe 120 tonnes out of those 10 acres or so that were affected. It knocked it all over.

"But what it also did, and I haven't seen this before, it ripped the cane out of the ground in places – pulled the roots out. I don't know if it'll die when I cut it, maybe it won't ratoon.

"But the biggest damage is the big gouge out of the river bank, that could cost me \$15,000 to fix."

Just down the road Gerard Puglisi is in the same boat, counting the cost of the recent flooding event.

Like Tano, the receding flood waters have left Gerard with lodged cane and significant damage to headlands and creek banks. He's is hoping the State Government will step in with funding to assist growers with repairs.

"We had a metre of rain from 23 December to the end of the year and that's probably what did most of our damage," Gerard said.



*Continues page 16 ►*



"A few trees fell down in the creek. We managed to clean up some of them, but when this next lot of flood water came through it's caused erosion in places that we've never had erosion before and I think it's due to those trees in the creek that we haven't had the opportunity to clean out, they've diverted the water in a different direction.

"It's not the biggest flood we've ever had, but it's probably close to a one in 100 year event.

"We haven't really done a full assessment of the damage yet, because it's been too wet to have a look around. We'll wait until it dries out and then work it out. Hopefully there's a bit of government money to try to fix up some of the erosion before we lose too much land.

"There are people around that have lost cane fields. We're pretty lucky that most of the damage has been to headlands and creek banks."

To the south of Mossman, brothers John and Richard Padovan are facing the prospect of having to spend thousands of dollars rebuilding creek banks for the second time in less than a year.

The creek that flows through the brothers' Cassowary farm suffered significant damage to its banks when more 600mm of rain fell over the course of just 10 hours back in March 2018. This latest rain event has undone most of the repair work the brothers carried out following the March flood.



"We spent around \$10,000 fixing the banks up after the March flood," John said. "At the time we had to get in and do it straight away because it was so serious that if we'd had any more rain the river would have broken through and washed out the whole paddock. So we got in and got it done."

"Now comes this flood with 600mm over four days and suddenly we're back to nearly where we were last March in terms of damage."

"The time and money that it takes to keep trying to fix everything after these floods is too much and you're not getting any help from anyone to try and maintain the rivers and prevent this damage from happening."

"Terrain have got money and they've been up about four or five times to look at it, but we haven't had any assistance yet."

Further south around the Cairns region, cane paddocks have been inundated by flood water in many areas, but growers haven't experienced the damaging torrents seen in Mossman.

At Freshwater, Mark Savina is philosophical about the rain despite the Freshwater Creek bursting its banks, closing roads and flooding a large area of the farm.

"It's getting back to a wet season that you accept, it used to happen all the time," Mark said.

"When I first started on the farm in '76, if you didn't have your work done by Christmas you were in trouble because you never went near the paddock again after that because it was so wet."

"Don't get me wrong, we'll get some damage and we'll lose some cane from this, but that's life, you've just got to wear it."

"Weeds will be the biggest problem for us, because we're only halfway through our spraying program so we're going to have a weed problem if we can't get that finished. Hopefully we'll get a couple of fine weeks in February to get that done."

"Personally, I'd rather have rain. My heart goes out to the boys out west and hopefully they get a bit of a drenching from this monsoon trough."

"I always tell my grandkids you never complain about the rain, because you can grow things with rain, but you can't grow them without it." ■

*Pictured: (opposite) Just months after spending thousands of dollars repairing creek banks from a previous flood event, Mossman grower John Padovan has seen all his hard work and money washed away in the latest deluge. (Below) Despite the inundation of his cane paddocks, Cairns grower Mark Savina is philosophical about the recent flooding.*



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Disclaimer: Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

<sup>1</sup>SuperRatings Fund Crediting Rate Survey – SR50 Balanced (60–76) Index – September 2018.

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# Policy Update

Industry with Burn Ashburner

Environment with Matt Kealley

## RD&E Priorities

Recently I was part of a panel convened to advise on the Queensland Department of Agriculture's (DAF) \$2.85 million per annum investment in RD&E projects through Sugar Research Australia. The process was to assess all SRA preliminary research proposals and match those with DAF's own strategic priorities.

Two of DAF's top strategic priorities are:

- Farmers adopting systems that deliver optimised input use efficiency (energy, water, chemicals, nutrients, precision ag) and minimise off site impacts.
- Value addition through identification of alternate products or uses of sugar cane or industry by-products.

That input use efficiency (particularly nitrogen, energy and water) is a government priority comes as no surprise given the focus on irrigation costs (electricity) and water quality and the Great Barrier Reef. Adoption of practices that are profitable and sustainable is also a big issue for the industry.

With the State Government's bio-futures policy and the biofuels mandate it is also not surprising that alternate products are a priority for DAF. Sugarcane is a very efficient producer of biomass as a feedstock and utilising this advantage makes sense.

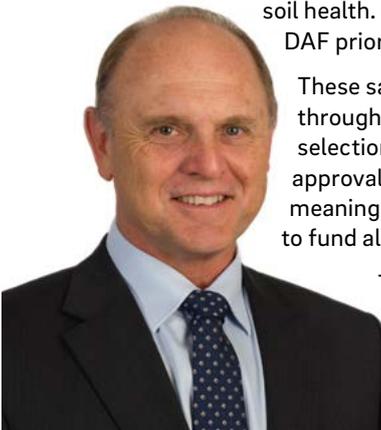
However, **Key Focus Area 6: Product diversification and value addition** is not one of SRA's highest investment areas (4% of the 2017/18 SRA investment). Despite this, DAF and SRA have invested in a project *Establishing A Strategic Roadmap for Product Diversification and Value Addition* to investigate a way forward.

The difficulty for industry in this area is not so much in solving technical issues for an alternate income, but in finding a sound business case (such as a market) with policy certainty.

Over the past few years, DAF has used its funding in a wide range of projects, most significantly in investigating yellow canopy syndrome, plant breeding and soil health. I see the industry and DAF priorities as complimentary.

These same proposals go through the SRA funding selection process and get final approval from the SRA Board, meaning the projects DAF agrees to fund also meet SRA priorities.

There is little doubt the industry welcomes this investment. ■



## Flooding and Reef Regs

Queensland sure is a land of contrasts – from drought to flood. From trying to get water onto the farm to grow cane, to trying to get water off the farm. From the high cost of electricity for irrigation to the high cost of the clean-up after flooding.

The challenge CANEGROWERS faces is telling our story in the context of the 2,100km of coastline we farm across – and our communications team does a wonderful job of this.

The impact of flooding on the community is front and centre in the media at the moment, and rightly so.

However, as the water starts to recede, news of the impact this flooding has had on the reef will inevitably find its way into the media. This, at a time when the Queensland Government is preparing to introduce amended reef regulations, is far from ideal timing.

CANEGROWERS is of the understanding that the proposed amended Reef Regulations Bill will be introduced to Parliament in one of the early sittings of the year, however, the exact timing will be decided by the Premier and the floods may delay this.

Regardless of the date, once the Bill is introduced, it will be referred to the Innovation, Tourism Development and Environment Committee for a report. This process will likely include an additional public consultation period with regional sessions. The Committee is usually given 6-8 weeks to compile its report.

At this stage it is expected the Bill will be debated in the April or May sittings and, if passed, the supporting amendments to the Reef Regulations will be taken to the Executive Council for approval for commencement early in the second half of 2019.

CANEGROWERS has been invited to participate in a Sugarcane Technical Working Group meeting earmarked for February or early March, to discuss the proposed reef regulations.

Our position on regulations hasn't changed and we will continue to lobby the Queensland Government Department of Environment & Science (DES) and the Office of the Great Barrier Reef (OGBR) on the proposed amendments. ■





**Warren Males**

CANEGROWERS Head Economics

*"The past couple of years have seen strong global production in response to high prices and, then predictably, prices fell in response to the surplus production."*

## SUPPLY AND PRICE VOLATILITY - OUR CONSTANT COMPANIONS

History shows us that, while uncomfortable and disruptive, supply fluctuations and price volatility have been the world sugar industry's constant companions.

From small-scale beginnings in Papua New Guinea, with no tariffs or other trade barriers to hold it back, the domestication and development of sugarcane spread in ancient times. The Persians and the Greeks were introduced to sugar sourced from India between the 6th and 4th centuries B.C. In the Middle Ages, the Crusaders returning to Britain took the product with them.

Sugar became a hit. It was much sought-after by royalty and those who could afford it. Making tea and coffee more palatable, sugar's popularity quickly spread. Prices were strong.

Demand drove the development of thriving sugar industries in the West Indies and Americas supplying Europe. With low production cost (on the back of slavery), imported sugar became plentiful and accessible to all.

In the early 1800s a major supply disruption, the Napoleonic Wars and British blockades of Europe, changed all that. Sugar prices rose and to restore supply to continental Europe, the sugar beet industry was born and it did well until the blockade was lifted and the lower cost cane sugar was once again available. Without support, the new industry barely survived.

Later that century another supply disruption, the end of the slave trade, meant enormous change in the West Indies and Americas. Cane sugar was no longer so cheap and the north American beet sugar industry emerged and grew.

In the 20th century, government controls during two World Wars were not sufficient to stabilise prices which fluctuated widely in response to supply disruptions and swings in global production.

In the early 2000's, Australia, Brazil and Thailand successfully challenged European sugar export subsidies in the World Trade Organisation. The disruption to EU exports resulted in a lift in world sugar prices and a strong global supply response.

After all of that turmoil and evolution, at the start of 2019, what's changed? Arguably nothing.

The past couple of years have seen strong global production in response to high prices and, then predictably, prices fell in response to the surplus production.

As the cycle turns there are signs that world production is now responding to the lower prices.

With government intervention widespread though, that response is slower than we would like.

In a recent report the sugar trading house Czarnikow writes, "We expect prices to bottom in the first half of 2019, if they haven't already. However, high global sugar stocks will make it hard for the market to strengthen significantly".

Czarnikow goes on to say, "Unless something catastrophic (to supply) happens".

In the sugar world, supply disruptions are a major driver of price volatility. ■



## Coastal floodplains – productivity for cane, but home to fish

Supplied by TropWATER

Floodplains have been modified and drained to accommodate urban and agricultural expansion in most parts of the world, including Australia. During the wet season, rivers and creeks spread across the landscape joining floodplains. Then, as the waters recede, these floodplains become disconnected from rivers and creeks, becoming isolated waters which provide a home to fish, turtles, crocodiles and birds.

Wetlands on floodplains need to be kept in a healthy condition through maintaining good water quality and tackling invasive weeds which can choke these aquatic habitats, causing poor water conditions. We all play an important role in protecting floodplain wetlands by keeping them free from poor water quality (sediment, fertilisers, pesticides), and free of invasive aquatic weeds.

In Australia, the barramundi has a life cycle that is tuned to floodplain connection. During the wet season, fish in isolated floodplain wetlands and in upstream freshwaters can migrate downstream to access important coastal estuaries, where they are able to successfully reproduce. During subsequent flood events, mature and the new recruits can return to floodplains or upstream freshwater areas. This process of disconnection and connection of floodplains is important to the success of the barramundi lifecycle.

Dr Nathan Waltham is a research scientist at James Cook University and is studying how we can best restore and protect wetlands on agricultural floodplains.

"This research is showing that healthy wetlands do support barramundi (very big barramundi) as well as many other fish, turtles, crocodiles and bird species," Dr Waltham said.

"I am particularly interested in hearing from farmers who are actively protecting floodplain wetlands on their property and learning how we can better protect these important aquatic habitats for future populations of barramundi."

"Everyone wants to catch a barramundi, by working with farmers and sharing my results, the opportunity for people to catch barramundi will be that little bit more possible, as we all work together to protect and restore coastal floodplain wetlands," said Dr Waltham.

This study is funded through the National Environment Science Program (NESP) Tropical Water Quality Hub (Australian Government), and will conclude December 2020.

For further information, please contact Dr Nathan Waltham (07 4781 4191) or [Nathan.waltham@jcu.edu.au](mailto:Nathan.waltham@jcu.edu.au) ■





## Video to help growers wanting to build a wetland

Supplied by DAF

A project trialling a constructed wetland treatment system in north Queensland has just released a video giving details about the project and its aims.

DAF Regional Extension Coordinator **Terri Buono** is involved in the project and said that as the wetland had finished construction the focus was now turning to water quality monitoring and analysis of the results.

"We've just produced a video to describe our project and hope this will be useful for cane farmers and extension agronomists who want to know more about such systems," Ms Buono said.

"The project aims to find out how effective wetland treatment systems can be in an intensive agricultural landscape in treating irrigation tail water (i.e. removing nutrients and pesticides) before this run off enters the Great Barrier Reef.

"We're planning to produce another video at the end of the project to let people know about the water quality results, but in the meantime early results are looking very positive with a reduction in dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN) entering waterways."

To view the new video head to the Qld Ag YouTube channel and look for 'Constructed Wetland Treatment System – Barratta Creek'.

The project is coordinated by a partnership of organisations interested in finding innovative, cost effective and practical ways to improve reef water quality.

The project managed by BBIFMAC, has received input from Wilmar Sugar,

Burdekin Shire Council, NQ Dry Tropics, Greening Australia, Lower Burdekin Landcare, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Australian Wetland Consulting and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Australian Wetland Consulting designed the wetland, while SunWater provided significant in-kind contributions towards construction and project advice.

Importantly, adjacent landowners have contributed time, farm practice records and manual labour.

The project is funded by the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries funded video production and provided Flexible Funding to enable more rigorous water quality monitoring. ■



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# Get involved to help us tell your story

Being an environmental scientist who grew up in the west, growing sugarcane was something I didn't know much about when I first joined CANEGROWERS.



**Matt Kealley**

CANEGROWERS Senior  
Manager - Membership  
Engagement & Innovation

So the first thing I did was to get on farm, kick some dirt and try to understand the growers who we are representing.

I soon learned that growers had a good story to tell. They were innovative, problem solvers and used good practices.

They were rightly proud of their achievements, worked hard to support their family, were community-minded and liked where they lived. They also tried to find time to enjoy their environment particularly the Great Barrier Reef.

One of the first families that I met was the Papale family in the Burdekin.

Vince and Rita showed me around their farm and explained the practices they used. I felt privileged for the time they spent with me and humbled to be so welcomed.

Vince showed me his irrigation, fertiliser equipment and a low-lying area that always got waterlogged in the wet season and wasn't as productive as other parts of the farm.

Over the years, I got to know their kids, their hopes and dreams, their successes and their frustrations. One of which was how they were perceived as killing the reef.

This really struck home for me and I remember Vince telling me his plan to build a wetland on that low-lying area.

He was doing this for two reasons. Firstly, he wanted to improve that part of his farm that wasn't productive.

More importantly, Vince wanted to make his kids feel proud that their mum and dad were cane growers and they were looking after the environment.

Vince and Rita built that wetland - it was four hectares and was a significant investment of time, money and belief.

They received some money from the Australian Government's Reef Rescue grant program, for which they were grateful, but most of it came out of their pocket.

I still catch up with Vince and Rita when I can. The last time I visited, the wetland was looking fantastic and doing its job of capturing water.

The trees had grown, and the wetland had matured, attracting birds, fish and even the odd crocodile.

The paddock that was waterlogged had been renovated and was now producing more cane, which is a testament to their vision.

Growers like Vince and Rita are everywhere in the Queensland sugarcane industry. They are working to improve their farm, make a living and support their family.

Growers have such a good story to tell and we need to tell it. We need to tell it to set the record straight. We need to tell it to show our environmental credentials, our innovative problem solving and our contribution to the community and economy.

We also need to tell our story to inspire the next generation of sugarcane growers and industry leaders to build on this legacy and shape the future.

From now until 18 February 2019, you have the opportunity to help tell our story by nominating for your local Board and voting in the CANEGROWERS elections.

If you're not quite ready but want to contribute to our organisation, speak with your local office or go to the Elections page at [www.canegrowers.com.au](http://www.canegrowers.com.au) to find out how you can get involved.

If you're passionate about your industry and want to help shape the future of our organisation and industry – we're keen to hear from you.

After all, it's your influence that shapes the future of CANEGROWERS and it's your stories that we need to tell. ■



*Pictured: The wetland built by Vince and Rita Papale.*

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Next deadline is **18 February 2019**.

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Location	Recorded rainfall (mm)		Year to date	Average rainfall (mm) January-February
	7 days to 9am			
	28.01.19	04.02.19		
Mossman	642	133	939	918
Mareeba AP	158	178	385	444
Cairns	498	343	992	835
Mt Sophia	578	315	1079	1165
Babinda	0	0	0	1368
Innisfail	364	310	873	1100
Tully	68	251	506	1336
Cardwell	322	324	848	902
Lucinda	300	803	1247	846
Ingham	65	1160	1516	827
Abergowrie	200	448	872	718
Townsville	83	1053	1158	566
Ayr DPI	64	412	551	445
Proserpine	119	293	557	645
Mirani	55	222	570	652
Mackay	60	84	292	598
Sarina (Plane Ck)	0.8	301	603	749
Bundaberg	0.4	16	20	330
Childers South	0	4	8	250
Maryborough	0.2	15	22	338
Tewantin	5	4	10	453
Eumundi	0	5	7	474
Nambour	0.2	17	32	489
Woongoolba	0	1	1	330
Murwillumbah	0	8	10	428
Ballina	1	0.4	2	377
Woodburn	0	0	0	306



**Australian Designed and Engineered**

**ROCCA ST-350**



The ROCCA ST-350 Heavy-Duty SpeedTiller is designed to chop up heavy residue of sugar cane mulch. Leaves behind a perfectly conditioned seedbed. It's fast speed saves money on fuel and labour costs. Where other machines leave hardpan compaction in the soil, the ROCCA ST-350 does not. Up to 26in discs available for good penetration in tough soil.

**List Price: \$28,500**

**Now for a Limited Time -**

**\$19,950!**  
(+GST +Freight)

**1800 899 885**  
<https://www.roccaindustries.com>



The industry super fund for rural and regional Australia

Zero indicates either no rain or no report was sent. These rainfall figures are subject to verification and may be updated later. Weather forecasts, radar and satellite images and other information for the farming community can be accessed on [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au). Weather report provided by the Bureau of Meteorology's Commercial Weather Services Unit.

be easily returned to short chop \$36,000. Ph: 0428 611 714.

2500 Cameco full track cane harvester 1995/96 excellent condition. 1998 Ursus 4514 tractor 4x4 Rops 68hp 730 hrs good condition. MF 1085 good condition. Poplin billet planter excellent condition. Rinaudo 3t stainless steel Fertilizer box side dresser. Iffrance 3.5 inch hard hose irrigator. Howard 3 leg square plough. Ph: 0488 053 298.

Irrigator - 6 span Valley pivot/lateral. Damaged in Cyclone Debbie & is dismantled in crane sized pieces. Franna crane is available free to complete the dismantle and load. \$20,000 ONO. Ph: 0466 789 414.

AV Farm All \$6,000 + GST. Napier 16 plate off set's \$2,300 + GST. 1941 Chrysler Sedan \$12,000 incl GST (neg). Trailco Irrigator T450 \$9,500 incl GST. Ph 0419 577 110.

## Bundaberg-Rocky Point

Spray coup model 3640 Manual transmission 18m boom 3230 hours. Good working condition \$22,000 + GST. Ph: 0477 704 134. SILVEN 500kg SPREADER, VERY GOOD ORDER, \$450. 3ft BARE PTO SHAFT, NEW, \$75. Ph: 0402 085 833.

Austoft secondary extractor hood 3 ft plastic in good condition \$660. Ph: 0413 584 728.

Argo 8 wheel drive go anywhere, safe, comfortable, won't tip over, 750 cc vanguard motor \$20,000 landed price. Vetch hay, vetch seed, barley seed, POA. All located in South Australia. Ph: 0408 824 790.

6T side tipper on Austin truck, \$6,000 + GST, Trash incorporator, s/steel worm &

plastic bin, \$13,500 + GST, 2004 BA Falcon low kms, \$6,000 + GST. Other implements available also. Ph: 0419 577 110.

High Rise sprayer, 3500ltr, self levelling boom with 5 row Irvin legs \$16,500. Hodge Trash incorporator \$6,600. Single row air seeder \$3,850. Fowler crane \$3,300. Nut de-husker \$1,650. Single phase cold room \$1,650. 2 x southern cross pumps, triton tub & more, can email all items, no longer used so need cleared, make an offer. All prices include GST. Ph: 0417 644 001.

## Wanted

STL SHARES wanted. Genuine grower. Pay market price. Ph: 0407 567 825.

Looking for STL shares to purchase. Willing to buy at current market rates. Please phone 0401 896 999.

Wanting to buy SUGAR TERMINAL LIMITED shares. Market rates apply and I'll pay for any transfer costs. Please call me on 0459 108 193.

Wanted to buy 20.8-42 rims with or without tyres to suit John Deere tractor. Ph: 0407 639 985.

800Lt Silvan or Hardi Spray Tank Unit. Ph: 0488 633 777.

## Work Wanted

Looking for work in 2019 harvest. I have a HC truck lic, worked as a work shop assistant in a heavy vehicle truck repair company as a heavy diesel trades assistant (2000-2014). Currently working in the earthmoving industry. Looking for work around

Proserpine, Mackay, Burdekin regions. Ph: 0404 637 459.

## Property

Babinda area. 125 acres. Over 4,000 tonne average past 6 years. Fully equipped with crop, town water. \$420,000. Ph: 0407 364 012.

GLEN ISLA Cane Farms - Tightly Held Area. Approx\* 334.82 acres in 8 FH titles with fertile alluvial soils. 2 equip irrig bores, mains & hydrants, 190ML allocation. Qlder style home. Motivated Vendors looking to retire. Ph: Gary Johns 0427 241 250.

HOME BUSH/OAKENDEN Cane Farm for sale Mackay region. 100t/ha 5 year average 57 ha property. Fully laser levelled farm with a large bore & underground water mains. Block has 2 deeds 90 acre and 50 acre which can be sold separately. This year's crop, machinery shed with 3 phase power and water, tractor, irrigation winch, some implements and tail water pit pump included in sale. Siding on boundary, great soil, no rocks. Ph: Andrew 0428 597 324.

Cane farm Tarakan Road ABERGOWRIE 270 acres freehold Genuine enquiries pls. Ph: 07 4777 4633 or 0408 608 664.

Tropical Paradise Cane Farm/Equestrian Training Property, 96 acres 6kms to PORT DOUGLAS. All farmable land, 70 acres producing quality cane, 25 acres set up for horses. Easy farm to maintain. Ph: Mandy 0408 880 724.



# ELECTIONS 2019 NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN

[WWW.CANEGROWERS.COM.AU](http://WWW.CANEGROWERS.COM.AU)

# Spotted anything unusual?

## NOTHING WILL PROTECT YOUR CROP BETTER THAN A GOOD HARD LOOK

Growers have an important role in keeping watch for exotic pests, diseases and weeds that could devastate the Australian sugarcane industry.

Early detection and reporting is the key to protecting farms, industries and the communities that rely on them. Every moment lost harms our chance of successful eradication.

If you spot anything unusual in your crop please call the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881. The call is free (except from mobiles).

Visit [phau.com.au/industries/sugarcane](http://phau.com.au/industries/sugarcane) for further information and a list of the top priority cane pests.



**Look, be alert, call an expert**