



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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WINE INDUSTRY AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (5.05 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Wine Industry Amendment Bill 2007. The primary policy objective of the bill is to amend the Wine Industry Act 1994, to support innovation and growth in the state's wine industry and to avoid unnecessary regulation. The legislation comes to this place following a review of the Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy, which was originally released in December 2004. The primary goal of this strategy is to develop a sustainable, diverse and innovative Queensland wine industry. The bill will implement a range of amendments designed to streamline wine producer licensing procedures to allow a wine merchant to convert to the wine producer licence category; maintain a wine producer's licence during times of unexpected natural disasters or infestation by pests or disease; simplify wine permit procedures; make a wine merchant licence holder eligible to obtain a wine permit; establish 8 am as the standard opening time for wine producers, satellite cellar door outlets and wine merchants; and simplify licensing procedures to reduce applicant costs and minimise the time taken to obtain a wine industry licence.

The Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy has four key principles, including an integrated planning and implementation framework; strategic partnerships with government, growers, producers and distributors; consensus about what needs to be done for the future; and ongoing review of the strategy.

The Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy mentions the close links between the wine industry and the tourism sector and the important gains to be made from a partnership between the two. That is reflected in the amendments to the legislation to establish 8 am as the standard opening time for wine producers, satellite cellar door outlets and wine merchants, recognising that an important part of cellar door operations is the partnerships they have with tourism operators. The Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy also outlines a commitment to encouraging the industry in regional areas. Again, the regional tourism sector is a key partner in the development of the Wine Industry Development Strategy.

While my electorate of Hinchinbrook grows more than its fair share of high-quality horticultural produce, it does not grow any grapes. However, not all wine is made out of grapes. In far-north Queensland there is a strongly emerging tropical fruit wine industry. When the current Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy was developed and initiated in 2004, the tropical fruit wine industry was still a relatively small emerging industry.

Ms Boyle: In fact, you have some in your own electorate.

Mr CRIPPS: I sure do, Minister. I will get to those in a moment. There is only a brief mention of the fruit wine industry in that 2004 document describing it primarily as producing boutique wines for domestic consumption from tropical fruits. The description of the industry may well have been true in 2004. However, this is certainly changing and the tropical fruit wine industry deserves a much more prominent place in the new Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy that will be developed out of the changes to the legislation as a result of this bill.

In the 2004 Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy document, nine key strategies, strategies A to I, were developed to achieve a range of industry goals. In only two strategy areas, E and F, dealing with the development of regional branding and marketing strategies and developing strategic partnerships, is any specific reference made to the tropical fruit wine industry. Point 4 of strategy E outlines an intention to work with the Association of Tropical North Queensland Winemakers to further develop and promote the exhibition and judging of fruit wine in appropriate events and shows. Point 3 of strategy F outlines an intention to work with the Department of Local Government and Planning at the time and relevant peak bodies to improve the level of awareness and understanding by councils of new winery developments, the benefits of regional wine tourism and general winery operations, including fruit wines.

I think the tropical fruit wine industry should have a more prominent position in the new Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy. I would be pleased to support any initiatives that the minister might like to pursue to encourage the tropical wine industry in far-north Queensland. I know the minister has inherited this bill, but I am concerned about the absence of any major initiatives to specifically encourage the development of north Queensland's tropical fruit wine industry. As a fellow north Queenslander, I would expect that the minister would be equally as concerned that the tropical fruit wine industry is not afforded a more prominent place in the Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy, although I do note some recent media comments by the minister that north Queensland's tropical fruit wineries have gained some enhanced recognition on Queensland's wine and food map. I welcome this development and the complementary comments made by the minister about the quality of the wines and the increasing value as an industry, because that adds value to our primary industries and has resulted in a close relationship with our established tourism industries.

The 2004 Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy identifies the fact that, as the importance of consumer interest in lifestyle products such as wine and food continues to grow, the importance of strong links with the tourism industry also increases. Queensland's vibrant tourism industry has a strong and well-established visitor base providing the fruit wine industry with excellent opportunities to showcase its product. This is equally true in far-north Queensland where the tourism industry is of central importance to the region's economy and with which the tropical fruit wine industry has formed strong links as a partner and in its own right as a tourism attraction.

At this point I want to talk about the three fruit wineries that are well established in my electorate of Hinchinbrook. Murdering Point Winery on Murdering Point Road between Silkwood and Kurrimine Beach offers a range of red and white fruit wines and ports. Founded by the Berryman family in 2001, Murdering Point Winery has rapidly gained a reputation for the quality of its wines and the innovative use of a wide range of exotic tropical fruits, particularly in making wines using Australian native tropical fruits. Murdering Point Winery took out Best Wine of Show at the 2006 Australian Fruit Wine Show. Murdering Point Winery had the first fruit wine to be included in the prestigious Queensland Premier's Dozen. The winery is now nationally recognised as one of the leading tourist attractions in regional Queensland as a finalist in the 2007 Australian Tourism Awards after winning a 2006 Queensland Tourism Award and being a finalist in 2005. Paradise Wines at Mission Beach specialises in gourmet banana wine. Mary Lankester, who is a former Queensland Rural Woman of the Year from 2002, founded Paradise Wines in 2000. Large-scale commercial production began in June 2003 and Paradise Wines cellar door opened to the public in November 2003.

Pacific Blue Wine currently operates a cellar door in Ingham. Pat O'Brien and Rhonda Foster have been creating award-winning fruit wines since the early 1990s. The quality of Pacific Blue Wine has been recognised both on a local and a national level. In 2003 Pacific Blue won two gold medals at the prestigious Adelaide National Amateur Wine Show for its lychee wines. In 2004 it was able to add a seven-medal tally at the Cairns Wine Show for wines using wild limes and lychees amongst other tropical fruits. In 2005 Pacific Blue added more awards to its credit. Pacific Blue was invited to enter the Tasmanian Fruit Wine Show and secured four gold, five silver and three bronze medals as well as one of its wines winning the best wine of the show.

As the minister can probably guess, the tropical fruit wine industry is achieving outstanding results at a national level. I feel strongly that the revised Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy needs to give more than a cursory acknowledgement to the fruit wine industry in far-north Queensland. Fruit wine makers have driven the development of their industry with strong innovation initiatives and impressive marketing efforts to tap into niche markets and tourism opportunities. It would be marvellous to see the Queensland government support the tropical fruit wine industry in far-north Queensland with some initiatives to help the industry develop further in a range of areas, and a more prominent place in the Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy would be an appropriate place for this enhanced support to commence.

Support for developing emerging industries in regional areas such as the tropical fruit wine industry in far-north Queensland can come in a range of different ways. As far as the tropical fruit wine industry is concerned, having industry development officers based at the South Johnstone DPIF research station to provide a support and advice network to north Queensland's emerging tropical fruit industries would be an

excellent initiative. There is enormous potential for a range of new products to be developed from a huge variety of tropical fruits grown in the Hinchinbrook electorate and right across far-north Queensland. The purpose of industry development officers would be to target new domestic and export markets for tropical fruit growers and establishing partnerships between growers and those businesses that are value adding to the fruit such as emerging industries like the fruit wineries in far-north Queensland.

Difficulties that wineries face periodically include obtaining a secure supply of tropical fruits, both exotic and native, for the production of their wines. Weather conditions can be extreme in tropical climates and unexpected events such as floods, cyclones and pest or disease outbreaks can seriously affect fruit production and supply. This obviously creates limitations for tropical fruit wineries if they are to expand their operations outside of niche and gourmet markets to outlets and venues across Queensland, Australia and in international markets and be capable of meeting orders for wines made out of these tropical fruits that can periodically be difficult to source. This is the sort of practical assistance that would be of great benefit to the fruit wine industry, and I hope the minister can take this feedback on board, recognise the significant potential of the fruit wine industry in far-north Queensland and make the development of this industry a focus rather than a footnote of the new Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy to build on the success of the traditional grape wine industry in southern Queensland—not that there is anything wrong with the traditional grape wine industry in southern Queensland. This is an excellent opportunity for Queensland to secure a place as a national leader in this emerging fruit wine industry. In doing so, the Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy would be positively pursuing two of its stated goals in encouraging close links between the wine industry and the tourism sector and its commitment to encouraging the industry in regional areas.

Finally, last year the Speaker of the Queensland parliament launched the Queensland Parliament House range of wines consisting of eight wines named after various well-known characters and identities from Queensland's political history. While there is quite a range of wines on that list, there are, regrettably, no tropical fruit wines from north Queensland. I would have thought that with the Speaker being a fellow north Queenslander he would have ensured that north Queensland tropical fruit wines were represented in this range of inaugural Queensland Parliament House wines. It would have been entirely appropriate for the Red Ted, a 2005 shiraz from Sirromet Wines named after former Premier of Queensland Ted Theodore, to be a north Queensland fruit wine. After all, Premier Theodore himself was a north Queensland MP. I am confident, however, that now that I have highlighted this oversight the Speaker will address the matter when the next range comes out. With those comments on the record, I am happy to support the bill.