

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NO B/154

B/154 **The Honourable Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix**
(17.04.07) **(Mr Soodhun)**

To ask Dr the Honourable Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries:-

Whether, in the light of the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy Action Plan submitted to the European Union and in view of the increasing conversion of agricultural land for industrial, Integrated Resort Scheme (IRS) and hotel projects, he will state if a national plan has been prepared for land use for agricultural and non-sugar farming activities and, if so, will he state if a copy thereof will be tabled?

REPLY

Mr Speaker Sir,

Currently, the area under sugar cane cultivation is 71,468 hectares. It is projected in the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy Action Plan of Mauritius that by 2015 some 9,000 hectares of sugar cane land will be converted to non-agricultural use in a normal development scenario. Owners will convert sugar cane land for non-cane agricultural activities, for residential and other uses. This includes 3,000 of the 5,000 hectares in difficult areas where it will be no longer economically viable to cultivate sugar cane. The 2,000 hectares would still be under cane with a production potential of 12,000 tonnes of sugar.

2. The Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy (MAAS) provides for the production of 520,000 metric tonnes of sugar annually to meet our

obligations vis-à-vis the European Union and the United States. The reform of the sugar cane industry therefore also includes projects to increase yields per unit area, better farming layout, better yield variety and better extraction methods. The land required to achieve this target would be around 63,000 hectares.

3. I am informed by the MSIRI that there are 63,160 hectares of land which are highly or moderately suitable for sugar cane cultivation. Of these, 42,400 hectares belong to the miller/corporate planters; 2,100 hectares to large planters owning 40 hectares or more land; and 18,865 hectares to the small planters. Five maps, one for each geographical sector, showing the cane land belonging to the different categories of planters are being tabled.

4. I am advised, on the assumption that:

(i) every year, 11% of the land are replanted with better varieties giving an acreage of 15% more sugar on highly suitable land and 10% on moderately suitable plots; and

(ii) replacement of existing varieties with improved ones will be completed by 2015,

the increase in sugar production over land cultivated by miller/corporate planters and large planters will be around 47,340 tonnes. Total sugar production by these two categories of planters is thus expected to be in the order of 421,000 tonnes by 2015. Around 100,000 tonnes of sugar are expected to be produced by small planters, who by then, are expected to have reduced their costs of production and improved their productivity as a result of the regrouping exercise which has started last year.

5. With regard to industrial, Integrated Resort Scheme and hotel projects, I am informed by the Ministry of Housing and Lands that provision has been made in the Four District Council Outline Planning Schemes for a flexible and responsive development management approach, instead of the prescriptive and rigid approach. A clustering and sequential approach to development planning is adopted where proposals are likely to be acceptable if they meet all performance criteria spelt out in the various policies on industrial development and tourism. The relevant policy documents (Policies ID1 – ID4 for industrial development) and (Policies CDT1 – CDT3 for tourism) are also being tabled.

6. Regarding non-sugar farming activities, there has been a shift to Agro-Industry, with much emphasis on the transformation of our agriculture from a primary to an agro-industry base sector to increase value added for our farmers and agribusiness entrepreneurs. Government is sending a strong signal to the farming community and to the population at large that SMEs and agri-business are the way forward for a modern agricultural sector, for wealth creation, employment opportunities and the alleviation of poverty. Traditional food crops planters who already own or lease land for their activities, are also being encouraged to engage in agro-business activities. In order to democratize access to land and enable the development of the agribusiness sector, Government has invited the Mauritius Sugar Planters Association (MSPA), Sugar Investment Trust (SIT) and Rose Belle Sugar Estate (RBSE) to allocate land to planters, which they have done.

7. MSPA has leased some 100A of land for diversification mainly for food crops, fruits and ornamental production. 15 sugar estates have already identified sites and 192 lots have been earmarked. To date, portions of 0.5A each have been allocated to 170 beneficiaries. A fact sheet on land suitability and potential crops that can be grown has been

prepared for each site. SIT has leased 100A of land at La Flora St Avole for 100 beneficiaries in lots of 1A. RBSE has identified land for agricultural diversification as follows:

- (i) an area of 200A at Bananes, for food crops, fruits and ornamental production. 110 beneficiaries have already signed an agreement with Rose Belle Sugar Estate;
- (ii) an area of 80A at St Hubert for Livestock production. Some 31 beneficiaries have already signed the contract agreement; and
- (iii) an area of 20A at Cluny for setting up of a hydroponic village. 12 promoters have already expressed their intention to invest in the hydroponic food crops production.

8. The Land Conversion Committee chaired by my Ministry and comprising important stakeholders such as representatives of Ministry of Housing and Lands, Mauritius Sugar Authority, Sugar Insurance Fund Board, Irrigation Authority and local authorities, is fully aware of the need to ensure that the means for achieving the objective of the MAAS are available and will be more vigilant in dealing with applications for conversion of agricultural land which fall within the 63,000 hectares of land critical for sugar cane production.