

# the Australian Cane Farmer

## Sugar on agenda in review of AUSFTA

**F**ederal Trade Minister Mark Vaile has pledged to put sugar on the agenda when he meets with US representatives in March to review the first year of the Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the US.

"There may be an opportunity in the future to include it, and so we'll continue to put that forward as an ambition of ours," Mr Vaile said.

Meanwhile, Queensland Nationals Senator Barnaby Joyce has signaled that he may block a move to scrap a drug-price safeguard in the FTA unless sugar farmers are given greater access to US markets.

"If the Americans are saying they need to have their case heard about pharmaceuticals then they would have to have our case about sugar heard," he said.

ACFA Chairman Ross Walker said that to not have sugar included for a second time would be completely unacceptable.

"The sugar industry was devastated when the details of the AUSFTA were announced in early 2004 and sugar was not included," Mr Walker said.

"A lot has happened in the sugar industry since that time, including the Government's Sugar Industry Reform Program 2004 and higher world sugar prices - and these have helped towards giving the industry a more sustainable future.

"However, sugar prices are extremely volatile and any improved access to the US sugar market would help to deliver additional security to the industry.

"If there is any opportunity to renegotiate sugar into the deal it must not be passed up," he said.

However, the US Sugar Alliance has told the ABC that it will strongly oppose any changes to the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Australia that would allow greater access for Australian sugar into the US market.

Alliance spokesman Jack Rooney said that American farmers oppose the inclusion of sugar in any free trade agreement.

"There's no benefit certainly for US producers from that, and probably only very limited benefit for Australian producers," he said.

The FTA has been criticised as "lopsided" after statistics revealed that imports from the US rose 5.7 per cent while merchandise exports fell 4.7 per cent.

Mr Vaile pointed to the stronger dollar and increased competition from Asia for the disappointing results.

Sources: The Australian 5th January 2006; The Courier Mail 5th January 2006; www.abc.net.au

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### Breaking News

It has been confirmed: 2005 was Australia's hottest year on record with a mean temperature of 22.89C.

Naturally, the higher temperatures have put the issue of climate change back on the agenda, especially with the holding of the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate conference in Sydney this month.

For all the outcomes and announcements made during the conference, see page 4 of this magazine



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