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MEDIA RELEASE

CANE PLANTING PROGRAMME A FAILURE: NFP

The Sugarcane Planting Programme being implemented by the Ministry of Sugar through the Fiji Sugar Corporation has been a miserable failure leading to the decline in sugarcane production for the 2017 harvesting and crushing season.

FSC Chief Executive Officer Graham Clark and Chairman Vishnu Mohan's recent statement that the estimate for this season of 2.1 million tonnes has been revised downwards to 1.8 million tonnes due to the effects of the dry weather is misleading. We believe FSC's bungling of both the estimates and the replanting programme will result in a further decline to the current projection by the Corporation when the total crop is crushed.

FSC must admit that it got its forecast of the total crop tonnage wrong in the first place. It boldly announced a pre-crush estimate of 2.1 million tonnes. But FSC failed to conduct what in normal field practice is known as out turn to estimates, that should have been done progressively since the start of the season. That is the accurate way to determine the exact tonnage of the crop.

More than 3 three months after the start of the crushing season when 70% of the crop has been harvested and crushed, FSC suddenly woke up and realised that the production has declined. This means that the FSC Executive and Senior Management were sleeping on the job.

The cane production is declining simply due to the failure of the replanting programme. Under the programme cane growers are compelled to look for their own funding mostly through loans to prepare land, purchase cane seeds and carry out planting. In most cases growers are refunded the expenses incurred 4 months after replanting.

All correspondence should be addressed to the general secretary

This is preposterous. How does the Ministry of Sugar and FSC expect growers who are struggling to survive, have the ability to replant new crop?

The correct and common-sense approach would have been to implement the programme like a CRP – Crop Rehabilitation Programme, similar to what was done in 1998/99 by the then SVT Government through negotiation by then NFP parliamentary opposition following the prolonged 1998 drought that resulted in crop production increasing by 100 percent.

In 1998 the total crop production was 2.098 million tonnes. One year later following the implementation of CRP the total cane crushed was 3.958 million tonnes. A further 170,000 tonnes was left unharvested when the mills stopped crushing.

The Ministry for Sugar and FSC can learn from the highly successful implementation of the CRP 18 years ago and correct its failed replanting programme if they want crop production to increase in order for the industry to survive.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'Jagannath Sami'.

Jaganath Sami
General Secretary

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