

MEDIA RELEASE

New sugar manufacturing Chair says incoming Queensland Government can unlock the industry's enormous economic potential

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Australia's sugar manufacturers want to see an incoming Queensland Government that will unlock the real potential of the sugar industry and tackle the big issues standing in the way of growth, diversification and job creation.

That is the message from the newly elected chair of the industry body, the Australian Sugar Milling Council (ASMC), that represents companies manufacturing more than 80% of the State's second largest agricultural export commodity.

Shayne Rutherford, Head of Wilmar Sugar and Renewables, the country's largest raw sugar manufacturer and a national leader in renewables, has been elected Chair of the ASMC, succeeding Jannik Olejas, the departing CEO of Mackay Sugar Limited (MSL), who is returning to Denmark in a senior management role with MSL majority shareholder, Nordzucker.

Mr Rutherford wasted no time today throwing down a challenge to political parties contesting the upcoming Queensland election: "Whomever forms government must tackle the issues that prevent the sugar industry realising its enormous economic, social and environmental potential for the benefit of the state and the nation," he said.

"Our industry generates \$4.4 billion in economic activity, supports more than 20,000 jobs – mostly in regional Queensland - and produces Queensland's second biggest agricultural export commodity."

"As ASMC Chair I want to send a clear message – Queensland governments cannot afford to continue ignoring the potential for an even greater contribution from this industry, not only in sugar, but also through growth and diversification opportunities in bioenergy and the bioeconomy," Mr Rutherford said.

"We have ample reports and studies identifying exciting opportunities, including from ARENA and the CSIRO," he said.

"We know what's possible and what we can achieve. What we lack is the supportive investment, policy and regulatory environment to make it happen."

"The sugar manufacturing sector needs billions of dollars in new investments to maintain our existing economic contribution while also unlocking opportunities in renewable electricity and biofuels- and even production of bioplastics and proteins," Mr Rutherford said.

“It is a globally competitive market for capital, and so we need a ‘Team Queensland’ approach to attract and de-risk investments in our industry and encourage investors to put their money here rather than in competing places like India and Brazil.”

“We need the incoming Queensland Government to work with us to address fundamental issues – we need access to a reliable and skilled workforce, we need to ensure our extensive cane railways are fit-for-purpose for the second largest freight task in the state, and we need more R&D that will underpin our viability as a cutting-edge manufacturing sector,” he said.

“Above all, we need a policy environment that de-risks investment in Australian sugar manufacturing, rather than add needless barriers and uncertainty.”

“Millers and growers also need to work together more constructively and cooperatively on these opportunities and challenges, and I take that on as a priority in my role as ASMC Chairman,” Mr Rutherford said.

“I am optimistic about the future for our industry. We have been an essential part of Queensland’s economic development for more than 150 years, and we will continue to be a globally competitive producer of raw sugar, a key part of Queensland’s renewable energy story, and the backbone of regional economies up and down the state’s coast.”

Mr. Rutherford thanked the outgoing ASMC Chair, Mr. Jannik Olejas, for his leadership of the sector, particularly in transitioning the ASMC to an organisation focussed on actively dealing with industry challenges and opportunities.

Shayne Rutherford has more than two decades of senior leadership experience in the sugar industry, as well as management experience in the grains, mining, and oil and gas industries.

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About the Australian Sugar Milling Council: *The Australian Sugar Milling Council is the peak industry body for the Australian sugar milling sector – contributing \$4.4 billion annually to the Australian economy and supporting more than 20,000 jobs. The ASMC works with its members, industry stakeholders, other industry representatives and government to develop and promote policies that enhance the sustainability, viability and economic contribution of the sugar industry in Australia.*

Background: Summary of the ASMC election priorities

- **Target 34 Taskforce:** Establishing a government-industry taskforce to increase the annual cane supply to 34 million tonnes.
Why? To maintain the 20,000 jobs sugar supports and capture the new jobs in the bioeconomy, the sugar supply chain requires a larger supply of reliable cane.
- **Cane Rail Fund:** Securing an initial \$1.2 million for feasibility studies to optimise and maintain Queensland's cane railways.
Why? Cane rail zigzags through the state's coastal communities, moving freight on rail and easing the pressure off stretched regional roads. The Government must step up to ensure the continued reliability and safety of this network.
- **Centre for Advanced Sugar Manufacturing:** Investing \$2.5 million over four years to establish the proposed \$12m Centre of Excellence for Advanced Sugar Manufacturing, focusing on cutting-edge R&D and commercialisation.
Why? Research dollars and talent for advanced manufacturing are monopolised by Sydney and Melbourne. If we want good paying manufacturing jobs in Queensland, establishing an advanced sugar manufacturing R&D hub will help us attract the best and brightest to maintain and grow our manufacturing base.
- **Sugar Career Start Program:** Allocating \$1.7 million over three years to address workforce and skills shortages, ensuring the industry has the talent pipeline needed for future growth.
Why? Sugar manufacturing draws on local communities for the bulk of its workforce. We need a holistic plan to ensure we attract the best of the best and train up our local workforce not just for today, but for the jobs of the future.

The full ASMC election priorities can be found here: <https://asmc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/STATE-ELECTION-PRIORITIES-DOCUMENT-Final.pdf>