

# Cairns Post

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1979

20 PAGES

Recommended Price 15c.

By air extra.

## WEATHER

Isolated afternoon and night thunderstorms over the Peninsula and western parts of Barron and Herbert. Few showers near the coast. Light to moderate southeast to northeast winds.



PLANS to establish a \$200,000 coffee plantation in North Queensland could end in dismal economic failure, a senior official of the Primary Industries department has claimed.

Coffee was a labor intensive crop, he said. Such a project could only succeed with improvements in cultivation techniques and development of machine harvesting, or with Federal Government tariff protection.

The Lands Minister, Mr Hewitt, announced in July \$200,000 would be spent to establish a coffee plantation and processing plant on 67 ha in the Mareeba-Dimbulah area

## Coffee project in balance

*THIS report was prepared by University of Queensland journalism student Harold WRIGHT.*

fee bean price rises substantially," Mr Hewitt said.

Coffee beans ripened indiscriminately, he said. Four to six pickings would be needed over the ripening period to ensure quality and high prices and this would cause heavy production costs.

Experiments were being carried out with chemical sprays, such as ethephon, to make all the berries ripen at the same time. This

would mean one picking only, with huge savings in labor costs.

No mechanical harvester was available at present, he said, but one could be developed if the harvest were a once only picking.

Coffee was extensively grown in North Queensland at Kuranda, in the 1890s.

In 1900, 60 plantations totalling 175 ha were in production.

It was also grown successfully on Burdekin Mountain.

After Federation in 1901, the new Federal Government reduced the protective tariff and the crop became uneconomic because of the high labor requirement.

Heavy widespread frosts in 1902, which severely damaged nearly all plantations, ended the early attempts to grow coffee commercially. No further attempts were made until this present venture.

The current world price

for coffee beans was about \$4800 a tonne.

Six years ago, the Primary Industries Department official said, the price was only \$900 a tonne, but severe frosts in 1974 had destroyed most of the Brazil crop, forcing the price up to \$7000 a tonne.

At the latter price, he said, coffee could be grown profitably in Queensland.

The price fluctuated, however, and by the time the Queensland plantation was producing, the Brazilian plantations would again be in full production, with consequent reductions in prices.

# Cairns Post

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1979

22 PAGES

Recommended Price 15c.

By air extra.

## WEATHER

Isolated showers east coast and nearby ranges. Winds mostly light to moderate east to northeast. High fire danger inland. Seas slight.



THE Department of Primary Industries fully supports the establishment of a coffee industry in North Queensland, senior horticulturist at the department's Kamerunga research station, Mr B. Watson said yesterday.

"Departmental officers have already contributed to and will continue to assist with the Southedge project in terms of advisory and research services, within the limits of resources and commitment, to other crops.

## DPI backs coffee project

"No departmental officer has ever claimed that the proposed planting at Southedge 'could end in dismal economic failure' as stated by Mr Harold Wright in his article in 'The Cairns Post' on October 25," he said.

Mr Wright has in fact not interviewed any departmental officer on the coffee development, but he does appear to have selected certain paragraphs from a horticulture branch advisory publication

which was written at the height of the coffee price escalation two-and-a-half years ago," Mr Watson said.

"At that stage, the department was concerned that growers might plant coffee in the hope of producing profitably, from hand harvesting.

"Then as now, the department considers that the crop must in the long term be harvested mechanically in order

to become an economic venture," he said.

He said in the past three years there have been developments in machine harvesting overseas and the owners of the Southedge development propose to include this technology in developing a harvester.

"In addition, it is hoped to use crop management practices to compress the maturity period of berries," Mr Watson said.