

## 6 | DISASTER AFTERMATH

# We've copped a thrashing, say devastated canegrowers

### SUGAR

SARAH ELKS

TULLY farmer Sid Musumeci surveys his bent and battered sugarcane crop and wonders how much more north Queensland canegrowers can take.

Cyclone Yasi tore the roof of the third-generation grower's family home last week, and ripped through his and his brother's 220ha of sugar cane.

Mr Musumeci reckons the damage is so bad that his harvest is likely to be half the size it usually is, and not as good in quality.

"We copped a thrashing," he said. "It's quite devastating. We had a tough year last year, and kept looking towards this year as a better year, one to recover."

Region-wide, Cyclone Yasi is estimated to have caused more

than \$500 million in damage to the industry, from as far north as Mossman, north of Cairns, to the Burdekin, south of Townsville.

That region supplies 60 per cent of the nation's sugar, and there are fears that Australia's sugar output could drop below last year's, which was the lowest in two decades.

Last year was such a bad year for canegrowers because of a long, particularly rainy, wet season.

Mr Musumeci said the full extent of the damage to his crop would not be felt until it was time to harvest, from mid-June to mid-November.

"This is the best growing time and now the crop has to recover from the smashing, then it has to regrow," he told *The Australian* from his property on the outskirts of Tully yesterday.

"I've lost so many months of that precious growing time."

Mr Musumeci said that when the cane had to regrow after being forcibly snapped and bent, it regrew messily and with less sugar content, meaning he would get less money a tonne.

Canegrowers Tully manager Peter Lucy said what caused more pain to growers was that global sugar prices were currently high.

"It would have been nice to cash in on it, especially after last year," Mr Lucy said.

Mr Musumeci said he spent last Wednesday night sheltering from Cyclone Yasi with his family in a makeshift concrete bunker in the centre of his home.

The force of the wind blew out the glass louvres of the bunker, which is normally a junk room, and lifted the roof off the house.

"If the wind had gone on for half an hour longer, there would have been no house left," Mr Musumeci said.