



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Hansard 3 March 1999

REVOCATION OF STATE FOREST AREAS

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (4.32 p.m.): I rise to second the motion moved by the Minister. In doing so I want to speak about two points within the revocation proposal. The first point concerns the Teemburra Dam proposal. This was an important part of the Sugar Infrastructure Package negotiated, as I remember, under the Keating Government in conjunction with the State Government. It was a \$62m project and was a very important project for the sugarcane farmers in the Pioneer Valley. This was a landmark proposal because, as I understand it, it was the first time that we had the sugar industry, the Government, and the sugar growers contributing to one infrastructure package. I understand it has been very successful. Today I have been advised that the dam is currently 83% full.

The farmers in the Pioneer Valley impressed upon us during the Goss Government years that they wanted assured and affordable water. This proposal was drawn up at a time when the sugar industry faced some very difficult decisions. The sugar infrastructure project was part of a package put together to help the sugar industry. That dam proposal has been very good. It is disappointing for the sugarcane regions that the world sugar price is very low at the moment. I know that that has an important flow-on effect on the Queensland economy.

Nevertheless, we should not overlook the significant—and I would say historic—contribution made by the former member for Mackay, Ed Casey, when he was Minister for Primary Industries. It was Casey's reforms that allowed us to have the largest area ever under sugarcane cultivation. We merely have to look at the area under cultivation around the Burdekin Dam. We must also look at the employment linkage effects that the sugar industry has historically had in this State.

I was interested to hear the Minister's comments about the Maryborough area. Maryborough Sugar Factory Limited had applied to purchase some land. When I was with Jim Elder some years ago, Maryborough Sugar impressed upon us the fact that it would like to purchase some land from Forestry. The Labor Opposition in those days was very sympathetic to the proposal. I understand from what the Minister is saying now that with the current world price of sugar, Maryborough Sugar can no longer proceed with that project.

I say to the Minister that we should keep an open mind on this because the sugar industry in Maryborough is an important employment generator—not just for the growers and the people who work in the mills but also for the people involved with transport. These people pick up the sugar and take it to the port of Bundaberg. For all those regional employment reasons I believe that we should always keep an open mind in order to assist the Maryborough sugar industry where we can.

I want to make a general point about forestry itself. I believe we have to look at forestry management issues because forests are a precious resource which, in some areas in the past, have been over-exploited. I know this is going to require careful management because it provides important employment opportunities in sawmilling towns. It is a precious resource and it needs to be managed.

I would like to see the Government develop a regional perspective to the industry. I notice that the member for Gympie is present in the Chamber. He could tell us about the important employment prospects that forestry offers to the City of Gympie. I would also like to see similar opportunities given to the people of Maryborough and Hervey Bay. I am well aware that that region could benefit from having better employment opportunities, particularly in the forestry area.

Over the next few years I would like to see the Government develop an incentive package to allow people who own private property to become involved in growing the timbers that we need to encourage import replacement and also to get into the hardwood timber industry. I know that a fair amount of timber is currently imported into this country and I believe it is being imported because of some bad environmental practices in some other countries. That cannot go on forever. If we position ourselves now by encouraging people to get involved in the hardwood industry, particularly by way of plantation industries on private property, we can become involved in import replacement and provide a benefit to the Australian economy.

I urge the Minister to think about these matters. I know he is very committed to the industry in that sense. Obviously these proposals will need to be worked through with local government. I know that the Minister has met with local government, representatives of the industry and with the Australian Workers Union, the union that covers the major part of this industry. We have to recognise the importance of sawmills to some of these small country towns in Queensland. We must remember the important job opportunities that the sawmills provide. I think it is necessary that we look at areas such as Maryborough and Hervey Bay. Those two areas are historic sawmilling areas.

I am aware that no speech has been made in this House in relation to Hervey Bay. It was a different situation when Bill Nunn was the local member. He continually pushed the issue of employment opportunities in Hervey Bay. I know that that has been sadly lacking over the last eight months. We want the people in Hervey Bay to know that we are on their side and that we are pushing for them whenever we get the chance. We will do the important hard work that is not being done for them.

Mr Dalgleish: Worry about your own seat.

Mr MICKEL: I have a great opportunity today when I am talking about logs to recognise one of the great logs in this place—the member for Hervey Bay. If he was a millable resource he would make a very valuable economic contribution to the people of Queensland.

Mr DALGLEISH: I rise to a point of order. I find those comments offensive and ask for them to be withdrawn.

Mr MICKEL: I withdraw them if he finds them offensive. I simply say that Labor supports this revocation and I encourage the House to do the same.
