



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (6.47 p.m.): We were told that the interim forest management agreement will facilitate the South East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement process that will establish a forest reserve system to provide certainty to native forest based industries and, at the same time, protect areas of high conservation value. The agreement will achieve the twin goals of maintaining access to the resource for the timber industry while not closing off future forest management options in south-east Queensland. Does any honourable member opposite really disagree with any of that?

Dr Prenzler interjected.

Mr MICKEL: The honourable member for Lockyer disagrees with it.

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Mr MICKEL: The honourable member for Western Downs disagrees with it. I am citing a media statement from the Leader of the Opposition when he was Premier. These were comments made by the then Premier on 16 March 1998, under the heading "Historic forest agreement signed". I might say that in the same release——

Mr LITTLEPROUD: I rise to a point of order. The honourable member has misrepresented me. He indicated that I was speaking against the statement he was quoting. That was not the case. I find it offensive and I ask for it to be withdrawn.

Mr MICKEL: I withdraw. In the same release, the Leader of the Opposition went on to praise Dr Aila Keto of the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society. All of the things that the Opposition opposes today were embraced back then by the Leader of the Opposition. The Opposition has no principle, no consistency and no plan. No matter how much the Opposition tries to disguise it, the Leader of the Opposition's fingerprints are all over the SEQ Regional Forest Agreement process. We do not have to do DNA tests on the books; the Leader of the Opposition is all over it——

Mr HOBBS: I rise to a point of order. We would like the member to know that we do agree with the process.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr MICKEL: The SEQ Regional Forest Agreement process began in January 1997 with the signature of a scoping agreement by the Prime Minister, John Howard, and the then Premier of Queensland, today's Leader of the Opposition. So there it is. The Leader of the Opposition and members of the shadow Cabinet have been running around, trying to deny ownership of this process. Now they claim to have all the answers, but they had none in Government. It is a continuation of the coalition's do-nothing approach to many of the problems it could not face up to in Government.

Today we should not have to debate the hardwood timber industry and the impact on regional towns. Decisions to plant hardwood timber should have been made 40 years ago, that is, in the second year of the then coalition Government under Nicklin. The National Party held most of those electorates and did not have the foresight to put in place a long-term plan.

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Mr MICKEL: I know it hurts, but those are the facts—undeniable facts. Forty years ago is when it should have been done.

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Western Downs will cease interjecting.

Mr MICKEL: Bjelke-Petersen freeholded many of the leasehold areas which today could have been the source for an enlarged hardwood industry. Instead, all those people who supported Bjelke-Petersen held close those photos of him driving that D9 as he clear-felled all the timber, squandering those precious timber resources. So at least the Opposition is consistent—it does not have the answers today and it did not have the answers then. So it will be up to the Labor Party, as it always is, to come in and clear up the mess that the Nationals could not fix up.

The first thing that we need to do is go out and meet with those communities affected and listen to them, and we are doing that. We also need, out of this process, to give the industry certainty. In that way, businesses will put in the money to value add and workers will decide their future. I would like to see an industry committed to import replacement— earning dollars for Queensland. We on this side of the House recognise the multiple uses that forestry can be put to in rural communities. We recognise and understand the importance of recreation and tourism in those areas and the conservation values of some of these areas.

But fundamentally, we are concerned for the people who work in that industry—workers who need and deserve decent workplace policies from a Labor Government, workers who in the main have few employment alternatives and workers who simply want to earn their income, pay their taxes and bring up their families. We cannot be about closing down this industry overnight with the tremendous social dislocation that that would cause; we need a long-term plan which will see transition to plantation timbers. A transition framework gives the industry time to adjust. It is not a new concept. A transition strategy was implemented in Queensland in the late 1920s with the harvest then at unsustainable rates of native hoop pine——

Time expired.
