



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (6.40 p.m.): I welcome this debate again tonight because it gives me the chance to pick up exactly where I left off the other night.

Mr Seeney: Same speech, is it?

Mr MICKEL: I was making the point then about a transition strategy, as the honourable member opposite would know only too well, implemented in Queensland in the late 1920s—a little bit before his time intellectually perhaps; nevertheless, he should bear with me—of the native softwood hoop pine which was being harvested at unsustainable rates. The transition enabled plantations to be developed as a replacement timber supply. An outcome of the implementation is the expanding plantation timber processing sector which dominates the south-east Queensland industry today.

One of the options for hardwood timber is to develop plantation timber. But, of course, the real job prospects emerge with value adding. I have spoken a number of times in this House about the need to value add our primary products, and timber is no exception. A report produced by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural Economics in November 1998 found that 28% of sawn output from south-east Queensland timber mills is currently processed further within the region. This report, I understand, outlined how up to 80% of green sawn timber could be further processed within south-east Queensland by 2020.

The strategies to achieve this—and I might say that One Nation has been totally bereft and silent on all of this—is to include cooperative investments in kiln drying, dressing and manufacturing of components. These could enhance access for sawmillers to both domestic and Asian markets. But, of course, One Nation does not want to hear about Asian markets. Do honourable members remember why its members beat up on the Asian markets last year when they first came in and we had to go around and try to restore the faith in those Asian markets?

Mr Feldman: You beat up on them.

Mr MICKEL: The member for Caboolture interjects. When I wander around the place I say, "The member for Caboolture is the Leader of One Nation", and people respond, "I can understand now why ancient Egyptians used to worship insects." That is the only way he could have become the Leader of One Nation.

Mr Black: At least he's the leader of a party—not like you.

Mr MICKEL: The member for Whitsunday interjects. He is a perfect living example of the saying that brains aren't everything, because in his case they are nothing at all.

ABARE found that, although smaller mills, essentially family operations, would not be directly involved in further processing, the development of further processing plants would enhance the long-term viability of these mills. None of this can be achieved as of right. Much of the success depends on the willingness and confidence of the industry to invest in itself. It also depends on non-Crown resources which remain available at viable commercial levels on a long-term sustainable basis. So there is hope for the industry, provided it carefully manages its sustainability.

Let us look at a few other positives. The natural strength, hardness, excellent surface finish and durability of south-east Queensland native hardwoods, together with south-east Queensland's freight

cost advantage over other parts of Australia, provide opportunities for Queensland in Asian markets, particularly Japan. Increased sales of hardwood rough sawn timber, decorative veneer and mouldings are possible, but the industry will need to reposition itself out of its traditional structural/framing markets, which account currently for 65% of sales. The value added products include mouldings, components, floor decking and panelling. Given the traditional get-up-and-go attitude of the rural sector in Queensland with developing exports, it can be done, but there is a need to look outwards to exports to achieve it. But in all of this we need the sustainability of the resource.

I had occasion last week to discuss the prospect of plantation timbers with people in the industry. The far-sighted family had taken action years ago to develop a private allocation. Plantations are one of the ways to supplement or complement native timber resources. Last week there was the exciting news of a million trees being planted in the Stanthorpe district, with the prospect of a sawmill. The Federal and Queensland Governments are helping, with a trebling of the national plantation estate by the year 2020 through private investment in the Plantations Vision 2020 program. Such a system offers Landcare and environmental benefits.

Mr Palaszczyk interjected.

Mr MICKEL: I take the interjection from the Minister. Japanese investment is in there as well. Time expired.
