



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (6.41 p.m.): We have just heard from the failure of the RFA—the man who claims to be trying to get some jobs for timber workers, but when it came down to it in the Borbidge Government, he could not even save his own job. So what confidence can we have that he knows anything about the RFA?

Prior to that we heard from the member for Crows Nest, who went on about the Fraser Island decision. The decision, of course, that he overlooked was the 1975 decision of the Fraser Government to ban mining on Fraser Island. What compensation did those people get—infinitesimal compared with the package that we put together!

We have heard also from the honourable gentleman opposite about the so-called sleazy deal. He should tell us about the sleazy deal that he did with Drew Hutton in the 1995 election. He should tell us all about that one when he, the member for Burnett and a few others signed off on a deal with what they now call the "extremist greenies". We remember it very, very well. But it is not just him. We remember the intervention of the member for Keppel up in Shoalwater Bay when he sold off any chance of mineral exploration up there—just to see if there were any minerals up there. He sold out to the greenies up there, despite the admonition of the mining industry.

I do not want to talk about those things tonight; I want to talk about the regional forest agreement. The RFA process has been claimed by some to be a destabilisation of the timber industry. Such claims do nothing to enhance the RFA process. It is not a fait accompli situation because the RFA is about consultation and negotiation. The RFA is an agreement between the Commonwealth and State Governments to set aside agreed forest areas in each State for conservation purposes and to pursue forest and timber industry development. Does the honourable member for Warrego disagree with that, because that is from a press release of the honourable Marc Rowell on 11 March 1998. I know how much the member for Warrego wants to distance himself from the member, but surely not in a public display of disagreement such as this. The fact of the matter is this: it is an agreement between the State and Federal Governments.

Let us deal with the timber industry. The Leader of the Opposition claimed this morning that there should be no job losses. That is what he wanted, yet when the backbench committee visited the town of Linville they were ignoring the RFA process. There was a restructuring going on in that town and some of the workers had to go to the town of Yarraman. That was happening and it has been happening in the industry regardless of the RFA process.

I have no objections to Finlaysons doing what they are doing in Linville. They struck me as an excellent family firm, dedicated to all the things that the honourable member for Crows Nest said were a bit of fairy floss. They are committed—absolutely committed—to value adding, to growing a productive industry and to developing export markets, and that is the way it should be. The fact of the matter is that, as technology changes and as commercial realities change for these firms, of course there will be job changes. I might say that the backbench committee found the same thing in the town of Eudlo, where a new owner came in, put on extra people thinking he could use them and then had to scale back. That is commercial reality.

But the most impressive aspect of our visit was the willingness on the part of so many of those sawmilling companies to explore export opportunities. We saw that in a number of towns, where they

are linking up with larger firms which can take the timber industry to the next stage of processing. We also saw the impressive way in which so many of those firms are looking to export markets, particularly to the Japanese market, at the moment.

I want to commend the Minister for State Development for the grant he has given to the Logan City Joinery in my electorate, which over the years has shown a tremendous capacity to develop its export markets. It has currently identified markets in the Philippines and Japan. This is aiding the work force, but it is also developing an export capability for timber products produced in my own electorate. I also want to commend Don Keogh Furniture in Crestmead—the only furniture exporter in Queensland today. These people are making something: making a positive contribution and value adding to the Queensland timber industry. That is the direction in which we want to see it going, and we should not squander it.
