



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (10.26 p.m.): This Bill gives the hardwood timber industry what it has always been seeking: 25 years of resource security. It gives the industry 25 years to plan for the future so that regional towns can get on with the job and so that millers who want to get into the task of value adding product can do so. Millers will know that if they make an investment, they will have resource security for 25 years. Of course, we hear objections from those opposite because this is a major departure from their policies: their policy of annual sales permits, their policy of reduced reductions and their policy of no planning. In other words, their policy of death by a thousand cuts.

This is landmark legislation from a Labor Government. It is landmark legislation that leaves the Opposition floundering in its wake, because it is only the Labor Party—and historically it has always been the Labor Party—that delivers the right outcomes for primary producers and regional and rural Queensland. The Labor Party has done that because we are not hogtied by the vested interests that control the preselections of all National Party members opposite. The National Party was never able to do the hard things or the decent things because, when it comes to reform, it has a heart the size of a split pea, and it knows it.

To prove my point, I ask members to look at the two and a half years of the Borbidge Government. What did it introduce for primary industries? Two minor pieces of legislation! The Borbidge Government was supposed to be the farmers' Government, but the farmers woke up to it and deserted it in record numbers in favour of the One Nation Party. On the big primary industries issues of the day, the National Party was never able to front up to the starting gate, whether the issue was sugar, dairying, animal care and protection, east coast trawler management, butcher shops or the cypress pine industry. The Labor Party delivered on all of those issues.

The Labor Party gave the cypress pine industry 15-year security agreements and new mills are starting as a result. With butcher shops, the Labor Party had to clean up the mess left to us by the member for Hinchinbrook. With sugar, the National Party was unable to put into legislation an agreement that had been signed off three years ago. All it had to do was come into Government, pick up the book, look at the agreement and put it to work, but it could not do it. In relation to the dairy industry, they fudged it to the point at which it will again be the Labor Party that has to step in and resolve the issue. And so it has been with respect to the RFA. According to some, the RFA is the first State regional forest agreement. It is an achievement.

Mr Seeney: It's a con job. You know it.

Mr MICKEL: A con job? I am inclined to think that it is an achievement. Why do I think it is an achievement? A press release of 5 May 1998 from Brian Littleproud lists some of the achievements of the coalition Government. At the top of the list is the "First State regional forest agreement". The National Party is walking away from its own Ministers in Government. It claimed it as an achievement in Government, yet in Opposition they walk away from it. The further away they get from Government, the worse their advice becomes. How dare the honourable member disown the member for Western Downs in such an unconscionable manner. How dare the member for Callide, in his scramble to get to the front bench, walk over the still warm body of the member for Western Downs. We heard from the Leader of the Opposition about how the spin doctors get to everything. He might like to speak to the honourable member for Western Downs about his media release. Of course, disappointments have been expressed, with claims that—

"... the RFA process represents a destabilisation of the timber industry. Such claims do nothing to achieve the RFA process; it's not a fait accompli situation because RFA is about consultation and negotiation. The RFA is not just about identifying areas for conservation, it's also about building in the development option to ensure Queensland's vital timber industry is in a better position ..."

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr MICKEL: I hear the member for Callide disagreeing with that statement also. Those words were uttered by none other than the member for Hinchinbrook on 11 March 1998—word for word. The member for Callide is this time scrambling over the body of the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr MICKEL: The honourable member is disowning his own words. After the butcher shop debacle, why would he not disown his own miserable performance in Government? He was not able to deliver a thing, including the RFA—and I just quoted his media release. They had all the time in the world to get an RFA. As we have seen from those two ministerial press releases, they did nothing. There was no consultation and nothing was completed. Similar to all of the other Bills, it was put in the too-hard basket.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke about availability of land studies being done. I am reliably informed that many such studies have been done. But in keeping with the record of the National Party, they were never acted upon by the former member for Barambah when he was the Minister for Primary Industries. They were certainly available to the member for Hinchinbrook during his unhappy but brief term as Primary Industries Minister. He never acted on those studies on the availability of land.

What the Government has achieved is this: unprecedented resource security. We are providing \$10m for industry development so that firms that want to undertake a much-needed value added component within their industry can do so. Using technology, more of the log can be used and this leads to value adding. At the moment, we all know that, using the existing technology, too much of the log is wasted. With advanced technology, we can reduce that wastage and achieve greater value adding—flooring, furniture and hobby wood. Yesterday I was approached by somebody who presented me with a new business strategic plan for using some of the wood from western Queensland—gidgee, boree, coolibah, wilga, blackwood, orange box, and Burdekin flame. He claims that those sorts of timbers can be put to use earning export dollars for Australia in all of those industries that I just mentioned. Has the National Party ever said a word about that? Have we heard about that in the debate so far? Absolutely not! Yet this is the stuff that could be providing employment opportunities not for Labor electorates but for western Queensland towns, which Opposition members claim are dying. However, they have not done a darned thing about it. There will be great need in some of these communities and there are some outstanding representatives in them.

I wish to speak about the mill we visited at Wondai. Outstanding people work in it and outstanding leadership is being shown by the team there. Let us talk about Skene Finlayson, Linville, which is outstanding in terms of technology, as is Grants in Woodford. But many other mill owners are looking for resource security so that they can think about whether they would like to undertake that value-adding process. I include in that Hyne and Son in Maryborough, an outstanding firm which as a result of this RFA process will provide bigger and better job opportunities in Maryborough. The member for Crows Nest and the Leader of the Opposition said there has been no consultation in all of this. In fact, there has been extensive consultation, and they know it—consultation that they could not be bothered with or were too lazy to get on with. All of the departments were involved in it, contrary to the advice given to this House by the Leader of the Opposition. The DPI, DNR, State Development, the Environmental Protection Agency—all played a role on the negotiating team. All played a role in providing advice.

The Leader of the Opposition went on to mention the Forestry Institute. I thought it strange that it had not been included. What did I find when I got hold of the document? The document that the honourable member for Crows Nest and the Leader of the Opposition were speaking about was not a post RFA document at all. In fact, it was a pre-RFA submission to the Directions Report. The document they quoted from is dated 25 June 1999, well before our decision. All of the people I mentioned are members of the Forestry Institute. The member deliberately misled this House in the way he presented that document. A squadron of people after him all claimed some authorship of this document. In fact, it was a document that was readily available. What happened? Wilson Tuckey rang the department for it and, not long after that, I understand the Leader of the Opposition's office woke up and said, "This is a document we can use." In other words, they had not done even the most basic research. This document was available.

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr MICKEL: I said "25 June".

What does it say? The honourable member for Crows Nest spoke about plantations and their inability to be grown in 25 years. I wish to quote from the document that all Opposition members have

loved to quote from but have never had the intestinal fortitude to wave around because they knew that the date would give them up. What does it say? It stated that there can be a 30 to 40 year rotation, although given adequate research and technological advances this could possibly be reduced to around 20 years.

Mr Stephan interjected.

Mr MICKEL: The honourable member for Gympie is now walking away from the document that the Opposition has quoted ad nauseam in this debate. They have given up Opposition spokesmen. Now they are giving up the Forestry Institute. They will give up everybody.

Mr Hayward: I think the electors will fix them up.

Mr MICKEL: The electors woke up to them. That is why they voted for One Nation in droves. That is why people in the bush say, "The National Party isn't for us. It is good to see you consulting."

We also heard from the honourable member opposite about deals with the Greens. I will speak about a deal with the Greens. Let us speak about the 1995 deal they did with Drew Hutton. There is absolute silence from members opposite. The member for Burnett, Doug Slack, along with all of the connivance and contrivance of those opposite, went along with a preference deal with the Greens in the 1995 election. We know that and the results are there for all to see. They would get back into bed with him as quickly as they could if they thought they could win the election with him. We know all about the National Party and its shabby deal with the Greens.

I want to commend the people who made themselves available to consult with the backbench committee when we conducted extensive consultations over a period of months throughout many parts of Queensland—Dingo, Rockhampton, Gladstone, up in the back of Benaraby to Builyan, Many Peaks, Bundaberg, Maryborough, Linville and the little towns out from Maryborough, Gympie, Cooroy, Mooloolah, Peachester and Woodford. On two occasions in Woodford we were not only able to meet with the mill workers and mill owners but went and did the hard yards that the National Party have never done—we went and saw the forestry for ourselves and saw the remarkable job they do.

Mr Stephan: That would have been the first time you had been in a forest.

Mr MICKEL: I hear the honourable gentleman from Gympie interjecting. He was nowhere to be seen when we visited Gympie—not a skerrick in sight; he was nowhere to be seen. I want to commend the Grant family in Woodford for the foresight they have shown in setting aside their own private areas of land some years ago for the private harvesting of hardwood timbers. That is foresight in an industry that was sadly lacking at a Government level. In those dreadful 32 years that quite happily came to an end 10 years ago under my predecessor the National Party found hardwood plantations all too hard and gave up. They could not be bothered. They could not see a future in it. So we are all left with those endearing images of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen on a bulldozer clearing the land. In other words, he was clearing away all the job opportunities for people—for the timberworkers and their families who were forgotten during that whole period of National Party Government.

I also want to thank the members of the Australian Workers Union, the general secretary, Bill Ludwig, and all the AWU organisers who made themselves available to meet with us and enable us to meet with the work force who are doing a great job in all those areas. I also want to thank people like Rod McInnes, John McNamara, Shein Finlayson and the Grant family who showed a maturity in their negotiations with professionalism and an eminent desire to be reasonable.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr MICKEL: Above all, these were the people in the negotiations who, unlike the members interjecting, were putting it on the line, putting their hands in their pockets to make the investment. Financially the workers wanted security, security so they could do all the things that other people do—buy a car and pay off a house. I also thank the Timber Board representatives because they wanted to give what was sadly lacking in their industry—namely, security to their members.

As I have said, these people are concerned about forestry, as are the workers in the industry. There was a tremendous amount of maturity shown in how they care for the forest and where they saw their future. They were prepared to give it their all. What has been the result? We have an outcome that is a model for all other jurisdictions—a national model that can provide a base for all the people who want to live off forestry as well, such as beekeepers and florists. I have noticed in these debates in the past that those opposite always have a bit of a giggle about the florists because they do not understand the industry.

They do not understand that a multimillion-dollar industry has been created in the electorate of the honourable member for Nicklin which exports millions of dollars worth of products to Europe and which creates much needed employment for people in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast—Cedar Hills Orchids Pty Ltd, trading as Cedar Hill Flowers and Foliage. What is more, when we met with them, they were very critical of the Boral extraction practices. I know that honourable members opposite think it is a giggle because they have never bothered to get in the car and get up there and see them. They think they know it all. I also want to commend the recreational users.

The honourable member for Crows Nest held up examples of what people felt about the RFA. But I am advised most of those comments were pre-RFA submissions sought in the directions report. Politics is about a battle of ideas. We have a Government with ideas, proposals and plans. Do we ever hear a plan, an alternative or a vision from the Opposition? No, it is knocking because they want to go about business the way they did last time—the same miserable Opposition producing the same miserable Government they were for two and a half years.

What people want to know from the Opposition is where they stand with the Federal Government. Do they stand with Wilson Tuckey and his attempts to derail the RFA, as he did so disastrously in Western Australia? Do they stand with Senator Hill on his tree-clearing initiatives? Do they stand with Senator Hill in his stance on coal fired power stations? Do they stand with Senator Hill on his plan on reef management or do they want to back Queensland for a change? Get up and work with the State Government and ensure the Federal Government comes right in behind us in a financial way to ensure that there is some indication of the likely level of Federal Government funding.

At this stage, the indications are that the Federal Government will not fund any plantation development—not any plantation development! We have to get on to the Federal Government to ensure that it starts releasing some of the purse strings so that regional and rural Queensland benefit. It is those benefits I want to speak about in the next few minutes. I commend the Minister for Primary Industries for calling for expressions of interest for the propagation of half a million hardwood seedlings required for planting next year in thousands of hectares. It is proposed that the seedlings are to be planted at Miriam Vale, in a region from Caboolture to Bundaberg, Kilcoy, Lockyer and the Brisbane Valley. The seedlings to be propagated are a eucalyptus species including blackbutt, Gympie messmate, spotted gum, white gum and rose gum hybrid.

Not only will this initiative help provide a secure future for Queensland's hardwood industry, it will also stimulate jobs and growth in the nursery industry. There are already some 700 hectares of hardwood plantation on private land in south-east Queensland. In addition to this, the Government is progressing hardwood research valued at \$8m. This is a tremendous initiative and a tremendous opportunity. It is what people have been looking forward to from the Government—any Government. Unlike the previous Government and unlike any of the speeches that have been given by the Opposition in this Parliament, we are actually doing the work and showing the lead. In Opposition and in Government, we have been on about resource security. We want a hardwood industry that can go forward, but I make this point: I believe we need the right-to-harvest legislation. We should be working on that to ensure that these plantations are secure. I would like to be in a situation where the environmental movement, the extremists—

Time expired.
