



Speech by

**Jason O'Brien**

**MEMBER FOR COOK**

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## **COOK ELECTORATE, FEDERAL FUNDING**

**Mr O'BRIEN** (Cook—ALP) (9.53 pm): The retiring member for Leichhardt owes the constituents of Cook \$9.5 million. Prior to the last federal election he made two commitments. One was to provide \$5 million for new facilities at the Weipa Hospital. I have spoken about that matter in this parliament before. It is suffice to say tonight that less than \$500,000 of that \$5 million has been actually committed from the federal government towards that hospital in Weipa. That is the first \$4.5 million that Mr Entsch owes the citizens of Cook for his promise.

The second commitment that Mr Entsch made prior to the last federal government election in 2004 was \$5 million for the Daintree buyback. At face value it appeared that he had delivered that \$5 million for the Daintree buyback when he gave that \$5 million to the Australian Rainforest Foundation to protect Daintree land. But when is \$5 million not \$5 million? When it is promised by the federal government is when it is not \$5 million. What we have found out now is that the Australian Rainforest Foundation has used that \$5 million, and money that has been given to it by the state government, to purchase land in the Daintree, but it is now using the fact that those development rights have been taken away to seek compensation from the state government for the very loss of the rights.

When is \$5 million not \$5 million? When the federal government gives it with one hand and tries to take it back from the state with the other. The Australian Rainforest Foundation has applied via the Douglas Shire Council for compensation on 22 blocks of rainforest land purchased with state and federal government funds and donations from philanthropists. The ARF is attempting to access funds from a program that was designed to compensate property owners in the Daintree who did have legitimate aspirations of building a home on the land and are now unable to do so due to the prescribed conservation zones in the planning scheme.

The state government has put \$15 million into the Daintree buyback and what happens is that we voluntarily buy that land back from people and it eventually goes back into the national park. What the Commonwealth is trying to do is use its agent, the ARF, as essentially a real estate agent. It is trying to double dip into the state fund. The state has already given it some money to purchase this land, the Commonwealth has given it some money to purchase this land and now it is trying to go back around the corner and get more money from the state government through its compensation fund. It is an absolute tragedy. It means that the \$5 million promised by the Commonwealth government is not \$5 million at all. I want that \$9.5 million.