



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Gippsland Electorate: Employment

SPEECH

Wednesday, 19 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Wednesday, 19 June 2013
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Questioner
Speaker Chester, Darren, MP

Source House
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Responder
Question No.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (09:47): I rise to raise the issue of a fundamental concern in Gippsland and throughout regional Australia—that is, the issue of sustainable long-term jobs for our communities. Our jobs underpin the future of regional towns, providing opportunities for young people to achieve their full potential and have decent career opportunities outside our cities. The issue of strategic development of regional development is quite broad ranging. I have always supported strong government investment, strategic investment in key infrastructure, along with leveraging off the private investment which occurs in our regional towns, to try to create new job opportunities. But one of the most important things to remember when it comes to regional development is making sure you look after the jobs you already have in your community.

Throughout my five years in parliament, I have been true to that commitment. I have endeavoured always to fight to keep the jobs we already have in Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley and to vigorously promote our region in order to secure new jobs and to expand our existing enterprises wherever possible. I regard it as a badge of honour that I have always been able to stand up for local jobs and protect the local economy in that regard. I view it very much as a partnership between the community, the business sector and all levels of government, and if that partnership breaks down the community suffers.

An issue of concern for me, one that I wish to bring to the House's attention, is contained in a petition which is being circulated at the moment by the CFMEU. This petition has my support. I have met with the CFMEU and the management of Australian Paper's Maryvale Mill on many occasions in Gippsland, and the issue of government procurement of Australian-made products is a common theme in our discussions. Almost a thousand people work at the pulp and paper mill in Gippsland. The member for Braddon visited and was very impressed with the operation that he saw there. The Australian government is the biggest purchaser of paper in Australia and we want the government to buy less imports and more Australian made paper to support jobs in local communities, support families and support regional areas like Gippsland.

The workers at the mill, the CFMEU, and the company are concerned that Australian companies are continuing to lose their procurement contracts with federal government agencies to overseas suppliers, which is putting their jobs at risk. It is a false economy for the federal government to save a few dollars on buying an imported product if the government then has to pay welfare benefits to displaced workers here in Australia. We hear a lot about free trade agreements in this place and the so-called level playing field, but the bottom line is that we are not comparing like products. The Australian paper and timber industry is heavily regulated. It meets the highest environmental standards in the world and provides a quality product which supports local jobs in areas like Gippsland. The shipping in of imported products with questionable environmental credentials is a folly with potentially devastating ramifications for local jobs in communities like Gippsland.

The government needs to ask whether we are getting true value for Australian taxpayers when we consider the full impact of awarding a contract offshore. I have some significant doubts. I urge all Gippslanders to sign this petition, which is being distributed by the CFMEU, and I look forward to returning to the parliament with thousands of signatures in support of local jobs. (*Time expired*)