



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Corio Electorate: Alcoa

SPEECH

Thursday, 12 February 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Speaker Marles, Richard, MP	Question No.

Mr MARLES (Corio) (10:53): On 18 February, Alcoa made its very difficult decision to cease operations in Geelong at Point Henry. This has resulted in a very significant economic shock for the city that I represent in this place. Next week will be the anniversary of that decision.

We in Labor understand that not every large business can be saved by government, nor is it indeed the role of government to save every large business. But I think there is an expectation on the part of people who work in organisations and companies such as that, which are a pillar of the private-sector economy in towns like Geelong, that their local representatives will do everything they can to fight for their jobs.

That did not happen on the part of government members, in this place, in respect to those people at Alcoa. Indeed, comments in the lead-up to the decision by Alcoa criticised Alcoa for being a company which was not clean and which did not inform its workers of what it was doing. We also heard comments by the Treasurer at the end of 2013, which effectively goaded another large company, Holden, to leave the shores of this country. This does not help.

We do understand that there will be occasions when large companies make decisions to cease their operations, notwithstanding the best endeavours of people to see those operations continue. That occurred in 2013, when Ford made another decision, in Geelong, to cease its operations at the end of 2016. When that very unfortunate decision was made by Ford, at the time of the Gillard government, on the very day the decision was made the Gillard Labor government announced a contribution towards a growth fund—a transition fund—for Geelong, which today has \$29½ million in it: the Geelong Region Innovation and Investment Fund.

Funds of this kind around the country make a difference. Indeed, a forerunner to that—the Geelong Investment and Innovation Fund—created almost 900 jobs in Geelong. GRIFF, the Geelong Region Innovation and Investment Fund, is on par to do a similar amount of work in terms of creating those jobs. And that is an enormous contribution to a city that is enduring a large economic shock, which is why this, as a policy mechanism, works.

Not surprisingly, as the member for Corio, I imagined that the Abbott Liberal government would, on the news that Alcoa was going to cease its operations in Geelong, make a contribution to a fund that would provide assistance for Geelong to transition in the face of an even larger economic shock associated with Alcoa, if measured by the number of people who would lose their jobs and the speed with which they would lose them.

But here we are—almost a year later—and not a cent has been committed by the Abbott Liberal government towards assisting Geelong to that transition that needs to occur by virtue of this very difficult decision by Alcoa. That is a disgrace. It is a disgrace because since then—on 1 August when the smelter closed its operations and later, on 19 December, when the rolling mill ceased its operations—we have seen 800 or 900 workers lose their employment directly from Alcoa's operations. Countless others, who work for organisations which were contracted to Alcoa, have lost their jobs. As a result, there is nothing to replace that. There could have been hundreds of jobs busily being created in its stead, right now, if a similar or larger amount—an amount commensurate with the number of people who were made unemployed—was contributed by this government. That did not happen. I call on it to happen now. It is an absolute disgrace, and it needs to be seen.

One matter which has been seen as something of a lifesaver for Geelong is the LAND 400 project—again, sprouted by local representatives of the Liberal government. We need to be very clear: this government is delaying LAND 400. There have been no updates to the Defence capability plan since this government came to power. As a result, LAND 400—touted as the saviour of Geelong—is languishing. That is a disgrace too.