



Speech by

**BILL FELDMAN**

**MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE**

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Hansard 3 December 1999

### **FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr FELDMAN** (Caboolture—ONP) (3.03 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Forestry Amendment Bill 1999. The agreement the Government refers to does not, despite the Government's contention, represent complete agreement on the part of all stakeholders in the industry. The agreement purports to provide for the grant of 25-year wood supply agreements with respect to Crown native forest hardwood sawlogs for most current sawlog allocation holders in south-east Queensland.

Clause 4(3)(a) states quite clearly that sales permits may be granted for a period of not more than 25 years. This clause fails to follow through on the Minister's statement that the legislation provides for the grant of 25-year wood supply agreements. What is the truth here? Are these permits to be for the full stated period of 25 years, or is the Government, by sleight of hand, intending to issue permits perhaps for some lesser period in some circumstances? I look forward to the Minister's response.

What this Bill most definitely does not do is provide access to suitable tracts of forest to ensure the continued supply of suitable sawlogs necessary to underpin the viability of hardwood millers and processors until such time as suitable size plantation logs become widely available.

Picking up on a point made by the member for Keppel in relation to that—I have already highlighted in this House on numerous occasions some of the industries that are going to be affected by this legislation. I refer in particular to Mr Les Torrens. I received some assurances from Mr Torrens the other day, but he has a permit that will last him for only about 50 trees. He already has orders for well in excess of 180 to 200 girders. He supplies girders for bridge construction to local shire councils throughout south-east Queensland, to Main Roads and Queensland Rail. That man has worked his business for some 11 to 15 years. He has worked in the timber industry all his life, and he knows virtually nothing else. What sort of compensation is he going to get when he cannot get those particular sawlogs that he requires? They are the ones that are locked up—the wet area timbers that are totally locked up by this.

**Mr Cooper:** They want to build bridges. That's all through the Brisbane Valley.

**Mr FELDMAN:** Too right! No local shire council can build its bridges out of steel and concrete.

**Mr Cooper:** They cannot afford it.

**Mr FELDMAN:** No, they cannot afford it—not at all. But where are they going to get this timber that they need—timber with the required strength for girders? Where is that man's business going to go? Right down the gurgler! And just as it has upset Mr Torrens, it has upset me. It has also upset something like 21 mayors and 16 shire councils. We met with some of them here the other night. Lyn Devereaux, Deputy Mayor of Caboolture, was the representative on the LGAQ for the RFAs. I have been told that she was not contacted once in the whole time that this was supposed to be done.

**Mr Mickel:** That's just not true.

**Mr FELDMAN:** I am only going on what I have been told.

**Mr Davidson:** You'd rather believe her than them.

**Mr FELDMAN:** I get on well with Lyn.

While the stated objective of the Bill appears laudable, it is simply a cruel hoax being played on the thousands of trusting timber industry families who took this Government at its word when it said that it would provide security of supply for 25 years. What a cruel and heartless hoax! The fact is that this Beattie Government, in its indecent haste to appease a lunatic mouldy green fringe of the environmental movement, has sold the futures of each and every child of a timber industry family down the proverbial river. And it did not even have the charity to provide them with a barbed wire canoe—which probably would have been appropriate, because they could not have built one out of wood. What good is a 25-year supply guarantee—if, in fact, it really is a guarantee—when there are simply not enough decent sized sawlogs in those areas that have not been locked up to go around?

**Mr Pearce:** Does that mean the resource is running out?

**Mr Cooper:** No, you are shutting it up.

**Mr FELDMAN:** That is right. The Government is shutting them out of those areas. It has shut up every single area of wetland timber. It shut them out. This Government has made a calculated choice between the threat of greenie disapproval at the next election and the future stability of yet another endangered rural industry.

**Mr Reynolds:** What about the barbed wire canoe?

**Mr FELDMAN:** Perhaps if trees grew out of barbed wire, those people might still have an industry. As one would expect from a Government which owes its slender majority to a backroom deal with the greenies, the decision was never in doubt. Why would the Government worry about the futures of a few insignificant bush towns when, by crawling to the city greenies, it can improve its chance of re-election. I hope those chances are now significantly reduced, thanks to its prostitution legislation.

This Bill does not ensure ecologically sustainable development. In fact, it guarantees stagnation and decay in an industry that, if managed wisely, has the potential to strengthen the social fabric of many rural communities while contributing positively to the nation's balance of payments. This Bill will not achieve efficient production and wood distribution. How can timber cutters be efficient when they have to pick through poor-quality blocks, many of which have been harvested recently? It is almost like telling them that they have to go back and clear-fell, which is not what the timber getters did; they were environmentally conscious people who went about their work in the required fashion. They did the firebreaks, cleaned up the undergrowth and prevented a lot of the devastation that we saw occur years and years ago. But no, that was not good enough: we have to lock up the areas. As I said, how can timber cutters be efficient when they have to pick through poor-quality blocks that have been harvested recently, looking for the few remaining trees of the size and quality that is able to be milled? How can millers be efficient when they have to pay increased haulage costs from distant blocks to obtain very ordinary, low-grade logs from which they struggle to cut half-decent sized timber?

I was told that, somewhere hidden in that RFA, is a landed log subsidy. I have placed a question on notice about that. I do not think that I have received an answer to that yet. I want to know, if millers are to be paid for the extra haulage costs, where is the money for that landed log subsidy coming from. Where in the budget was that allocation made? I did not see it. It might be another bit of devil hidden in the detail somewhere. I have not seen it.

This timber will then attract only low prices in a market supplied with high-quality imported timber from countries where indiscriminate clear-felling is still accepted. So we are going to accept timber from countries that clear-fell and that are not environmentally conscious. We in Australia are going to accept that with a clear conscience. We are not looking after an industry that is viable now and could have been viable in the future; instead we are destroying some Third World country by buying our timber from them.

This Bill will not promote the stability of the processing industry. How can we expect to have a stable processing industry when we must rely on attracting multimillion dollar investment and when, contrary to the Government's contention, there will be no guarantee of an ongoing supply of suitable logs? Secondary timber processors or value adding industries rely totally on an uninterrupted supply of quality feedstock to be able to produce a consistent, quality finished product that, in turn, must be capable of commanding a premium price in the market in order to remain viable. Instead, we are giving them rubbish timber to turn out a premium product. This Bill will not ensure security of supply.

Now that the industry has the opportunity to see some of the devil in the detail of the Government's cruel hoax, they realise that they have been sold out for short-term political gain. This Government has weighed the prospect of having greenie support in the next election against the future existence and stability of many south-east Queensland timber towns and the livelihood of many thousands of people who live in or rely upon those towns. It is in the interests of every member of this House to remember one thing: greenies will never be satisfied. It is just like tipping sand: they will never be satisfied, they just keep on draining away. If they demand this pound of flesh for support now, one can just imagine what they are going to demand in return for support for Labor at future elections. Let there be no doubt, the ultimate aim of this lunatic Left element is the total destruction of the

hardwood timber industry. They are a disgrace to the true conservationists. Their actions are economically and socially counterproductive.

Clause 4(3)(b) allows that a sales permit may—

"Provide for compensation payable to the permittee in stated circumstances."

What a wonderfully generous gesture on the part of this Government! The industry wants to know what the "stated circumstances" are. That is more devil in the detail. I think that this subclause was just designed to muffle the screams of the permittee who has just had his sales permit suspended or cancelled under Clause 5, which amends section 58 of the Act. What are the "particular circumstances" under which this suspension or cancellation may take place? I certainly, and the industry most assuredly, are waiting for an answer to those questions, and we need it.

The member for Keppel mentioned councils. The Caboolture Shire Council is but one of those councils. However, plenty of other councils are advocating that they have received a bad deal. They have been sold a pup; they are expected to sit by and watch their constituents get sold down the river. They know that that is not on.

To add insult to injury, at clause 4(3)(c), the Government is demanding that anybody who is awarded a sales permit must, by legislation, be required to give the State the first right of refusal to an assignment or transfer of the permit. Why does the Government want this clause?

**Mr Cooper:** To shut them down.

**Mr FELDMAN:** To shut them down and finish them off! At the end of the day, like cutting the head off a chook, the Government is putting them to the sword. The Government wants to further undermine the viability of this industry by buying back any allocations that come onto the market. Then we know what is going to happen: they are going to get locked up, too, and it will be the end of the story.

How will this impact on the transfer of family businesses down the generations? What can those people's kids inherit if they do not get the first option? Will this interfere with the legitimate business of amalgamating two or more struggling allocations to make a single, viable business unit? These are just some of the questions that are just racing through the hearts and the minds of these people who are struggling every day. It is getting harder and harder for them. Some of those people were hardworking Labor people who have suddenly seen Labor come back and bite them.

How can the Minister expect the wholehearted support of all the members of this House when the Government has patently misled the constituency during the so-called consultancy process? If this regional forest agreement is so wonderful, if it is going to achieve all its stated aims, then why have the likes of Boral sold out to the Government? Is it because this large company could see the writing on the wall and decided to get out rather than ride a mortally wounded industry into the grave?

This Bill and the unfair RFA that it supports are yet further examples of the lack of compassion and understanding that this Government has shown consistently towards anybody in this State who happens to live outside the metropolitan area. Anybody who lives outside George Street is finished. In consequence of what I have said and in the interests of the south-east Queensland timber industry, One Nation is unable to support this Bill. We have reached that decision after considering everything that I have just said, the comments of the mayors of these affected towns, the comments of the people who have come to see us and the comments of the industries and the flow-on industries that can see themselves being wiped out and written off. They do not like it. They need an answer that they will be able to live with, an answer that their children will be able to live with, and that their children's children will be able to live with. They are looking to their future. That is one reason why One Nation cannot support the Bill.

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