



Speech by  
**Hon. BRIAN  
LITTLEPROUD**

**MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS**

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Hansard 3 December 1999

**FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL**

**Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD** (Western Downs—NPA) (2.30 p.m.): When this Bill was being debated before the luncheon recess, I was intrigued to hear the Leader of the Opposition speaking about the Institute of Foresters. It took me back to my first few years in this House when I was serving on a committee with the then Minister responsible for forestry, Bill Glasson. I can remember the term "Conservator of Forests". The person who was in charge of the Forestry Department was called the Conservator of Forests. John Kelly comes to mind and so, too, does Tom Ryan. I have always felt rather sad that that term is not used so widely these days. The word getting more currency these days is "conservationist". Both come from the word "conservation". The expertise in and dedication to the profession of silviculture rested with the Conservator of Forests and the well-experienced people in the Department of Forestry. Unfortunately, too often these days conservationists are trying to influence policy, and not enough notice is being taken of the conservators of the forests.

I recall some of the issues of the day. I listened with intent to their wisdom. They had a record of sustainable harvesting. On one occasion during a Timber Week in Chinchilla, I took a group of school children to the Barakula forest, the biggest native forest in Queensland. There was a man there who was in his eighties. He was a second generation sawmiller. When he was a young boy, his family lived at Barakula. He was telling me about his experiences. He said that the Forestry Department of Queensland had been managing our forests well. He said, "This is the third time that our family has been harvesting a certain block within the Barakula State Forest. We have cut more timber this time than we did the second time, and we cut more timber the second time than we did in the first harvest." Those people had a proven record.

What upset me was that, suddenly, that wisdom was not only ignored but also challenged absolutely when a bloke like Graham Richardson came in with a political agenda and virtually called those people liars. Down the track it was revealed that when he was visiting the Wet Tropics he remarked on the pristine forest. The Queensland foresters reminded him that the place had been harvested for generations. Two or three trees per hectare were being taken every 30 years and it was said that the forest had been raped. All the wisdom of people like John Kelly and Tom Ryan, former Conservators of Forests was ignored, put aside—

**Mr Cooper:** Just for politics.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** It was torn asunder for politics. The conservationists rather than the conservators held sway. I have a sense that history is repeating itself here today.

I suspect that the decision to bring this Bill and the regional forest agreement before us today have more to do with listening to conservationists than taking full notice of the conservators. The Institute of Foresters is another factor. The Leader of the Opposition has revealed that those people were not part of the loop when advice was sought.

**Mr MICKEL:** I rise to a point of order. The statement made by the member for Western Downs is untrue. They were part of the agreement. The member is inadvertently misleading the House.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** It does not reflect on him.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. I point out to the member for Western Downs that I will look after the matter.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** I get stirred up because the member for Logan has been in the chair and he should know better. Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for reminding me of my place.

I go back now to 1996, when it became obvious in Queensland that the decisions about how we looked after the State forests, their trees and their harvesting had to be made on a scientific basis. The member for Warrego was then the Minister for Natural Resources. I can recall the discussions around the Cabinet table about the scoping studies that he put in place to determine the state of the forests. If the Institute of Foresters could give us information, I suspect it would confirm that the evidence coming forward from those responsible for sustainable harvesting of the State forests in the south-east corner of Queensland would show that they are in good shape. The timber areas have been reduced because of two factors. A lot of the land in the south-east corner of Queensland covered in forests is held privately. People have chosen to cut down the timber and use the land for other purposes. After 1990 when the Goss Government came to power and people saw the undue influence of the conservationists, I suspect some people said, "What's the good of us trying to grow out our timber? Just when it gets to be a handy sort of timber and we want to harvest it, along will come the Goss Government and say, 'You can't harvest that.' Even though it is private timber, they'll bring in legislation that comes over the top."

**Mr Mickel:** Tell us about the deal you did with Drew Hutton.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** I did not do any deals with Drew Hutton. He has probably been knocking on Labor's doors. The member for Logan raises an interesting issue. Rumour gets around the departments. When I became the Minister for the Environment and I moved into the new offices and was feeling my way and finding out what was going on, I noticed that there was a fair bit of space there. Officers said, "It is interesting to know, but you should know, that people like Aila Keto and Drew Hutton were camped in the back offices permanently." They were the ones who developed the policies that got members opposite chucked out of office. Now they are back in there again. They have a foot on the back of Labor's neck. Members opposite are listening to the conservationists again, rather than taking a bit of good advice from the department. They will be out on their ear again. Do you want some more?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the member for Western Downs to speak through Chair.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** You are quite right, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I listened to the debate about tree clearing. We are discussing not just the trees in the State forests but all the trees across Queensland. The member for Warrego, Howard Hobbs, was discussing the scientific data that came to his attention when he was the Minister.

**Mr Mickel:** Didn't he fly off to Canada?

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** I will get to Aila Keto in a few minutes. The member will love that, too.

The member for Warrego discussed the thickening of the forests. I refer again to Tom Holland, a sawmiller in the Barakula forest, north of Chinchilla. He was explaining to the children how the forest had changed. He is about 82 or 83. The man lived there well over 70 years ago. It was his job to bring in the house cows every night. He said, "Children, would you believe it? When I was a child, there was 80 acres of country there. I could look out in the morning and there wasn't a tree in sight. I could see exactly where the cows were in the paddock." I have been in this place for about 16 years, so that happened about 20 years ago. If members go to the Barakula forest today—

**Mr Mickel:** I've done that.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** It is a pity that the member did not get lost.

People who live in that part of the world will tell members that, when it was first settled, it was open forest country. In fact, the first person who had a pick of all the land in the Chinchilla district was Matthew Goggs, who also happened to own the house Wolston Park. He had the first choice of the land. He chose a place and called it Wongongera. His description of the land was: tall kangaroo grass, open pasture land with some large scattered trees. That land is smack bang in the middle of Barakula forest. He had first pick of all the land in the whole district. That is how things have changed. The personal experience of those people who lived there concords with the evidence coming from the scientists. The member for Warrego has said that the present Government is ignoring some of those facts. He was discussing thickening. I can tell honourable members of another personal experience about the road boundaries outside my property in the Chinchilla Shire. When I was a child I was told that when the roadways were cleared in the Depression years, gangs of men went through and ringbarked the roadways. It was quite possible to look from the roadway through the trees into people's properties. Those same roadways have not been burnt or dealt with for many years. I am fearful of some of my cattle getting out and my trying to drive them back along the roadway or even find them, because there is now an underscore of woody weeds and a thickening of all the timber. The scientific fact of thickening is a reality. I have seen it with my own eyes. It has been related to me by a man who

has been a sawmiller for two generations, yet those on the other side of the House are trying to ignore the fact that the forests of Queensland are thickening.

To return to the Bill, I make the point that not enough notice has been taken of the conservation of forests. Conservationists have had an unhealthy influence on things, which brings me to the next person I want to talk about, Dr Aila Keto. Dr Keto has had an enormous impact on the policies of Labor Governments. I had not been the Environment Minister for very long when Imogen Zethoven, the executive officer of the Queensland Conservation Council, requested a deputation, and she brought along Aila Keto.

I have a fair bit of respect for Aila Keto. She has had a lot of favourable press. At that particular time, I was embroiled in the whole process of trying to make some sense out of the management plan for the World Heritage area of the Wet Tropics. Aila Keto wanted to impress on me that there were some dreadful things going on. She started off by saying, "Do you know, Minister, that there are 1,100 kilometres of roadway through the World Heritage area of the Wet Tropics? Are you aware that that is impacting on 25% of the World Heritage area?" I said, "Are you sure about that?" She replied, "Yes, Minister, yes," and she kept on talking. By that time, I was adept enough at my mathematics to know that the World Heritage area was 400,000 hectares. On top of that, she said, "The roads impact for 250 metres either side into the World Heritage area." So I did my calculations. It came out at about 14%. I said, "Hang on, Aila. It is not 25%. It is 14%." She said, "Oh, it's a lot, at any rate."

I did not have the scientific knowledge to question her on the issue of how far a road impacts into a forest. She said 250 metres, but I was thinking just a moment ago about those people who were lost in the Lamington National Park. They were 100 metres off the road and they could not find it. Yet Aila Keto is coming up with scientific data which says that the mere fact a road goes through the Wet Tropics is impacting for 250 metres inside that area. That is another good example of too much notice being taken of conservationists and not much notice being taken of the conservation of forests.

Many previous speakers from this side of the House have made the point that poor policy making is going to impact enormously on the personal lives of the people. The people of Queensland have already been duped once during the Goss years by these sorts of arguments relating to the natural resources of Queensland. I can remember giving a pretty heated speech in the House one day during those times. The present Minister for Primary Industries came up to me afterwards and said, "Good speech, Brian." I was ranting and letting those on the other side know just how deep the hurt is out there and how much the people were against the Government.

At the ballot box it turned out that I was right. I warn those opposite that the same thing is happening again because there was no consultation. There is good evidence coming forward that the expertise of the Institute of Foresters has been completely ignored. The Government has used the spin doctors and the press to try to make something happen. It has been pointed out that the mayors of 16 councils in south-east Queensland met with members of the Opposition just the other day. They realise that what they were forced into in only September this year is now being seen to be a sham.

I am totally against this present form of the regional forest agreement. I pay tribute to the member for Warrego for the job that he did when he was the Minister for Natural Resources. He went through the scoping studies. He was using the scientific data, not ignoring it. He did not allow himself to be unduly influenced by people like Aila Keto. In fact, I think he was changing the minds of people like Aila Keto because, for the first time ever, she was going to sawmills and seeing what was going on in a practical sense rather than reading it in textbooks. I support all of those in the Opposition who warned the people of Queensland that what has been signed and what is going to be pushed on them is not what it seems, and that they will regret it.

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