



Speech by

BRUCE DAVIDSON

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard 27 October 1999

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr DAVIDSON (Noosa—LP) (6.11 p.m.): I second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. Shortly after the announcement of the regional forest agreement by the Premier and the Minister for State Development, I formally asked the Premier to meet with my constituents who were the only people to lose their livelihood in the timber industry with the closure of the Boral timber mill in Cooroy. This invitation was sent four weeks ago. I am still waiting for the courtesy of a formal response or, indeed, any form of response to this request.

Last week, I forwarded a formal submission on behalf of those same workers to the Premier; again I still await a formal response to this detailed submission and recommendations. The nearest we have come, by way of a response to the jobs issues I have raised time and time again, is from a "spokesperson" in the press, allegedly representing the Premier, who has now told us what is the Government's position on jobs for these workers. I quote from the Sunshine Coast Daily of 18 October—

"A spokesman for Mr Beattie said the question of job creation was a matter for the timber industry to address."

He said that the RFA was not a Government action but an agreement between a range of parties on the future management of timber resources.

Is this where the Premier and his Minister for State Development really stand after the much publicised "any timberworker in the timber industry, who wants a job in the timber industry, will have a job in the timber industry"? Is this why there has been no response? Is it because it is not their problem and is only an arrangement between other parties?

Within five weeks of the RFA announcement, when the member for Capalaba said in this House, "They talked the talk, but we walked the walk", are we now seeing a Pontius Pilate performance where they are washing their combined hands of their self-made plans to sacrifice the Cooroy timberworkers for the sake of some votes? Do the Premier and the Minister for State Development deny that they categorically stated in press releases on 16 September, "This is a win-win situation for timberworkers, for timber towns and the environment"? Did not the Premier go on to say this—

"In the meantime, this decision also means that many of those rural communities which rely on timber will remain viable and keep their timber jobs in those towns, which means they also keep their other services such as their schools or ambulance services."

Did we just imagine all these platitudes?

May I remind this House that the Boral mill in Cooroy is the most cost-effective and productive mill in Queensland. The mill is to be closed down simply because the Premier and his deputy withdrew Boral's allocation of 35,000 cubic metres of timber a year, thus making the mill non-viable and effectively blackmailing this company into submission.

Let me reiterate the bombast of the Premier of this State with his "Any timber worker, who wants a job in the timber industry, will have a job in the timber industry." Honourable members will recall that the Premier said that all these new jobs that would be available for the Cooroy timberworkers would come from: 241 jobs at Hyne Brothers in Maryborough; 100 jobs in the management of public and

private sector plantations; 100 jobs in the management of expanded conservation reserves; and 30 jobs in the Gympie region at Laminex.

I now ask the Premier and the Deputy Premier to show me and the people of Cooroy those jobs. I ask them to authenticate these job promises by tabling, in writing, in this House the guarantees that they gave these people. In speaking to these announcements by the Premier, the Minister for State Development said—

"But we haven't let the timber workers or the communities down ...This agreement will mean more jobs for the timber industry."

Let me tell honourable members what this doyen of the Australian Workers Union, the very same union of the timberworkers, considers as not letting the people down.

The member for Capalaba has positioned staff from his department in a shopfront in Cooroy for the specific purpose of finding timber jobs for timberworkers—as he again confirmed today. When a Cooroy timberworker visits this shopfront to inquire where his next job will be in this promise of 471 timber jobs, he has his particulars taken down, and these are then trundled off to Centrelink which presumably has all these jobs safely tucked away. Is it any wonder that the Cooroy people have no faith and no belief in this Minister's other promises of \$10m here, \$80,000 there, 5,000 hectares here and a study there. It goes on and on.

It would appear that, now that the RFA has disappeared from the pages of the Courier-Mail, this Government believes that the issue has disappeared. The Government believed that all is well, the mugs are satisfied, and the deal is done. The Government believes that all it had to do was lay quiet and this issue would never be an issue. The Government believed that there was no issue. Well, it is an issue! It is a life or death issue! It is an issue of people!

I seek leave to table the submission I previously sent to the Premier on behalf of the Cooroy workers. This submission sets out some options and possible solutions to this dilemma. The submission contains some proposals such as real redundancy packages which are equivalent to those that the Goss Government made to the Fraser Island workers. Such recommendations as this submission canvasses provide some real future and not some nebulous jobs which obviously this Government cannot sustain or provide for these workers.

Time expired.
