



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 25 May 1999

REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries) (6.26 p.m.): Tonight, we in this House should be grateful that we are now witnessing a miracle. From the fervour of the coalition's rhetoric, there can be no doubt that it has finally found the road to Damascus. For years, including their years in Government, offering support to the State's forestry industries was not an article of faith for members opposite. But now that they are under pressure from One Nation in their vulnerable heartland, the National Party in particular has discovered that it should have been doing something about the forestry industries. That is the only reason why the National Party has suddenly discovered that the forestry issue is going to hurt people in small country towns. Those One Nation members are a testimony to the reason why the National Party is at present carrying on the way it is.

In fact, it has been only in the past fortnight that the coalition has taken to the road trying to manufacture a position of concern about the future of the Queensland forestry industry. If only the Borbidge Government had been able to get its act together, this whole matter would have been finalised 12 months ago. However, once again the coalition has woken up too late. They cannot deceive even their own former heartland with their shallow rhetoric.

Since becoming Minister, I have spent a great deal of time visiting a wide range of forestry undertakings in south-east Queensland. I have had detailed discussions with people right across the full spectrum of interest. I have visited regional communities and talked with people involved in the forestry industry and have also had discussions on the same issues with the conservation movement. I have been out there talking and listening to the people involved and concerned about the future of the forestry industry in Queensland. My runs are on the board. So when we come to consider taking a final position on the RFA process, my contribution will be based on detailed consultation with the people who are mostly affected. However, members opposite, who have come to this issue very late, have no credibility at all on this issue. They are now trying to talk the talk, but I have walked the walk.

I have been to many of the key centres that are affected by the RFA issue, including Linville, Wondai, Gympie and Woodford. This Government is committed to an outcome that looks after jobs and the future of regional communities. We are keen to find an option that allows for the development of world class forest industries. The key to doing this effectively is to take up opportunities when they become available. That is something that the Borbidge Government patently failed to do.

Mr Borbidge and the Prime Minister, John Howard, signed a scoping agreement on the RFA in January 1997. When this document was signed, it was confidently expected that the process would have been completed by 30 June 1998. That means that, if the Borbidge Government had got its act together, the RFA could have been finalised just five days after the Beattie Government came to power. In fact, the Borbidge Government had been moving so slowly that it had already asked for a six-month extension until December last year, but when the Beattie Government came to power—

Mr Littleproud: What's wrong with that?

Mr PALASZCZUK: What is wrong with it? When we came to Government, we discovered that the former Government did so little that we had to have the period extended to finish the job that the previous Government failed to do.

This RFA process provides us with an historic opportunity to provide security and certainty for workers in the timber industry, regional communities that depend on the industry and the industry itself. We need to provide security and certainty—they are the two operative words in this process. Earlier this year, the House debated the future of the cypress pine industry. Although it is separate from the RFA issue in south-east Queensland, the issue relating to the future of the cypress pine industry clearly illustrates the Beattie Government's attitude to jobs and security for regional communities. Our top priority is jobs, jobs, jobs.

I look forward to the finalisation of the RFA agreement for south-east Queensland and sincerely trust that it will be supported by members opposite for the very sound reasons outlined in the amendment. Two weeks ago when I was in Esk opening an art show, I took the opportunity to speak to people in relation to the forestry issue. They told me that the four members opposite who turned up were doing a half Monty, because they did not know whether they were coming or going in relation to the regional forestry industry. They knew nothing about it. They were not ready for the full Monty.
