



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 20 July 1999

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries) (6.31 p.m.): I rise to support the Government's amendment, because this Government is committed to jobs and rural and regional Queensland. The Government recognises the need to provide security and certainty to the timber industry.

For instance, this Government has made an historic commitment to the cypress pine timber industry based in south-west and western Queensland. This is an exciting industry that generates about \$30m each year for Queensland and supports 2,000 direct and indirect jobs. This Government's commitment overcomes the uncertainty and insecurity generated by previous Governments. The Borbidge Government was prepared to allow the cypress pine industry to work on a year-by-year allocation regime.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr PALASZCZUK: The member should talk to his constituents about our decision and solution. They do not think much of the honourable member for Warrego any more. It took this Government seven months to come to a resolution.

The former Borbidge Government's approach stifled the exciting cypress pine industry and cost Queensland jobs. I refer honourable members to comments by the Taroom cypress mill operator, who was quoted recently in the Central Telegraph newspaper. She said that under the previous Borbidge Government she was forced to trim her work force from 14 to five. Now she concedes that there is potential for the mill's work force to increase. That is good news for Taroom and Queensland.

The regional forest agreement has provided an opportunity to deliver security and certainty to the south-east Queensland timber industry. As I have said, this Government is about delivering security and certainty. Just as the former Borbidge Government refused to offer security to the cypress pine industry in western Queensland, it did not deliver on the RFA it signed Queensland up to. The former Borbidge coalition Government promised to complete the agreement last year, but it had made no significant progress towards meeting its commitment when it lost office in June last year.

As the Minister for Primary Industries, I have been working closely with the timber industry, associated bodies and other stakeholders involved in the industry. Unlike members opposite, I have not sought to grandstand on this issue; I have sought to work with local communities and, along with my colleagues, I want to achieve a good outcome for Queensland. I have spent a great deal of time in communities in south-east Queensland and, in common with all honourable members, I look forward to the finalisation of the RFA process.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr PALASZCZUK: Even during my four days off I drove through those communities and spoke to people not only about the problems they are experiencing in the timber industry but also others. Unlike the honourable member opposite, I did not go outside this place to talk for the first time to the timberworkers who were protesting. I have been out to the regional communities and spoken to people.

I have taken on board their concerns and brought them back to my party and the Government. I have given a commitment to the timber industry, both the cypress pine timber industry and also the RFA process. When one speaks to the concerned people in the industry, one picks up from them the concerns that they have in relation to their jobs. Similar to the way in which this Government is committed to dairy farmers and the communities in which they live, it is committed also to the timberworkers and the communities in which they live.

Unlike the Opposition, we believe in looking after regional and rural Queensland. We believe in looking after their aspirations. More importantly, we believe in giving them certainty and security. At the end of the day, unless people in rural and regional communities have certainty and security, they will not be able to function. Therefore, I say to members opposite: stop grandstanding, join with the Government and support it. At the end of the day, this Government will deliver an outcome that will be beneficial to our timberworkers in south-east Queensland.

Time expired.
