



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard 7 December 1999

FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries) (11.22 p.m.), in reply: Before I discuss the contributions made by honourable members on both sides of the House, I want to say a few things in relation to many of the issues that were raised by Opposition members, One Nation members and certain Independent members. I have been a member of Parliament for about 15 years now. I have certainly travelled the State quite extensively. I have spent quite a bit of time speaking to our primary producers throughout the length and breadth of the State. In my travels since 1996, when the Federal Government changed and the coalition Government was installed in power, and the coalition assumed Government here in Queensland, the rural constituency believed that they would be looked after. Unfortunately, they were not looked after. The further I travelled in this State and the more I talked with our rural producers, two words were echoed by those people. The rural producers wanted certainty and security. Those two words—those two issues—were never addressed by the Federal Government and they were never addressed by the coalition State Government. In the two and a bit years that the coalition Government was in power here, in primary industries—which, of course, is the engine room for a National Party Government—they passed two minor pieces of legislation. As I said earlier this year, they left all the very important pieces of legislation in the back paddock.

Mr Bredhauer: It was too hard for them.

Mr PALASZCZUK: As the Honourable Minister for Transport said, they would not make the hard decisions. All of those hard decisions were left to our Government.

On the issue of certainty and security, the biggest cry came from the people of western Queensland who were involved in the cypress pine industry. The coalition Government could not give the cypress pine industry in Queensland security and certainty. When that issue was raised with me, and I could see the plight of those people out there who supported a \$30m industry, I took it upon myself to ensure that we gave those people there security and certainty. We did that. We delivered security and certainty to the cypress pine industry with 15-year contracts. They had been working on contracts that went year by year.

That is why I am so passionate about this piece of legislation, because I believe that, when enacted, it will give security and certainty to our timber industry and particularly our hardwood timber industry. That is why I was very disappointed to hear the contributions of many of the members opposite. At the end of the day, all the coalition members were doing was politicking, trying to regain the hearts and minds of the rural constituency in those seats that the One Nation members and the Independent members won from them. At the end of the day, that means that, once again, they are creating that air of uncertainty and insecurity among those rural and regional communities who really, really depend upon the timber industry for their living.

Let me reiterate that this Government is about trying to give not only the timber industry security and certainty but also other primary industries because, at the end of the day, our primary producers have suffered for far too long. This Government is trying to address many of the problems that they experience. We want to give our primary producers a sense of hope for the future. As I mentioned in my contribution during the tree-clearing debate, I make the prediction that, by the year 2010, our primary industries will be worth \$32 billion as against \$12 billion this year.

Other concerns were raised by certain members. I note that the member for Hinchinbrook raised a number of concerns about plantations of hardwood timbers— whether there will be enough rainfall and whether the soil types are correct and so on. I would like to inform the member that a land study was carried out by the Department of Primary Industries (Forestry), which ascertained that there is available land with the right soil types with sufficient rainfall. That study was commissioned by Trevor Perrett when he was the Minister for Primary Industries. I am quite sure that when the honourable member for Hinchinbrook became the Minister for Primary Industries, he was also aware of that study. I am saying that, for our hardwood plantations, we have available land and soil types with adequate rainfall.

The honourable member for Gladstone raised a couple of issues. Let me assure her that there are courses for DPI Forestry and Queensland Parks and Wildlife rangers conducted at the Gatton University. Each year, DPI Forestry take about 12 to 15 of these people through their Gympie establishment and out of those about four or five are employed each year. So there are a number of people who have been adequately trained to be able to take on those jobs. She also mentioned the issue of why, in the legislation, we talk about sales permits of up to 25 years. Obviously, that is the way in which the Parliamentary Counsel has drafted the legislation. In the actual sales contract, which will be negotiated with individual mills, the contract will run from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2024. Basically, that means that the sales permit will last for the 25 years.

I understand that the honourable member for Crows Nest will move three amendments to the legislation. I believe that if the honourable member for Crows Nest listens very closely now, my explanation might make him rethink his position. Clause 4(3)(c) of the Bill will "require the permittee to give the State the first right of refusal to an assignment or transfer of the permit". The principal reason for the State having the first right of refusal to purchase a permit is to endeavour to ensure that the associated saw milling business remains in its current and rural community, continuing to provide the same or improved local employment opportunities. We do not want that business to move away from the rural community in which it is centred. We want it to stay there. The Government has proposed this amendment to the Forestry Act to require the permittee to give the State the first right of refusal to an assignment or transfer of the permit.

I thank Government members for their very important contributions to the debate. They certainly showed that they understand what this Bill is all about. Unfortunately, members opposite really missed the boat when it came to reading the Bill. I have explained to the House that the Government is about giving security and certainty to the hardwood timber industry.

My backbench committee has taken the time to travel to areas within the RFA region and to speak with all the stakeholders involved. That was part of the consultative process that the Government undertook prior to the signing of the RFA. Certainly that dispels the comments of the member for Crows Nest, who stated that no consultation with stakeholders took place. Quite a while ago, I spent a number of days with the Forest Protection Society doing exactly what my backbench committee did. Unfortunately, I believe that the Opposition has missed the boat. Months and months ago this Government began talking to the people involved, as the members for Kurwongbah, Logan and Barron River can attest to.

The honourable member for Crows Nest spoke at length, but I do not believe that he really addressed the contents of the Bill. His contribution was based on numerous press releases. Most of the other members opposite carried on in the same vein. I thought that their contributions were repetitive to say the least.

I wish to read into Hansard an extract from correspondence from the Queensland Timber Board, which I received very recently. The letter states—

"The member for Crows Nest claimed in his speech that the main peak players had been left out of the agreement. The Queensland Timber Board endorsed"—

Mr Cooper: They claimed that, not me.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I am quoting the Queensland Timber Board. The letter continues—

"The Queensland Timber Board endorsed the agreement after extensive consultation between the timber board's chairman and deputy chairman and general manager.

Various issues within the agreement were canvassed with industry members to seek a level of support or otherwise without declaring the long term intention or the agreement as a whole."

The operative phrase is "canvassed with industry members". The letter then states—

"The Q.T.B. members endorsed the agreement, these members represent 90% of the Crown sawlog volume in south east Queensland and therefore the bulk of the investment and employment opportunities. These members continue to support the State Government/stakeholder agreement.

Not one Q.T.B. member has resigned nor has written to the board expressing concern or a reluctance to participate in the implementation of the agreement.

The Forest Protection Society is mentioned in the member for Crows Nest's speech. I would like to point out that the FPS is a timber communities organisation that is supported and funded by the timber industry."

Those are not my words; they are the words of the general manager of the Queensland Timber Board, Rod McInnes.

With respect to the Nandroya sawmill, that mill is owned by Boral Timber. Boral negotiated an outcome that was acceptable to all sides: Boral itself, the State Government and the Australian Workers Union, which is the body that represents the workers of that mill. All parties agreed.

The comment of the honourable member for Crows Nest with respect to the 25 year growth cycle for plantation hardwood, that is, that "any idiot would know that 25 years is not long enough", warrants response. Various members of Federal Minister Tuckey's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the two well-respected scientific organisations contained therein, namely, the Bureau of Rural Sciences and the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, say that one can, in fact, grow trees within 25 years. In September they published a document to support that statement. According to the honourable member for Crows Nest, the scientific people from ABARE and the Bureau of Rural Sciences are idiots. Those were his words. I am sure that they would be pleased to have such a tag from the member for Crows Nest.

The honourable member for Crows Nest went on to talk about 25-year wood supply agreements and other issues that are necessary for industry in the context of that 25-year period, including log haulage costs and structural adjustment for a change of species mix. Those issues are covered in the agreement in a number of areas, namely paragraphs 2.2, 2.3 and 2.17.

Members opposite were united in refusing to acknowledge the important role that their coalition colleagues in Canberra need to play in this matter. As its name suggests, the RFA is an agreement. In Queensland, we have achieved an historic agreement that was signed by the State Government, the timber industry and conservationists. Under this agreement, the Government is growing jobs, protecting regional communities and preserving south-east Queensland's native forests.

Last week, the Premier and Deputy Premier outlined the Government's disappointment with the Federal Government's response. For instance, the coalition's business tax changes will end the immediate deductibility provisions for investments in new timber plantations. Despite the pledges of the Federal Forestry Minister, Wilson Tuckey, the Federal coalition Government has taken a decision that will undermine regional development. The silence and inaction of the coalition members in this place undermines regional development. In stark contrast, I will highlight the State Government's commitment to hardwood plantations.

As honourable members would know, and a number of honourable members have mentioned this fact, previously the Government announced its intention to plant 10 million trees and establish 5,000 hectares of plantations. Last week, I told the House that the Department of Primary Industries (Forestry) advertised for expressions of interest for the propagation of half a million hardwood seedlings. It is proposed that the seedlings be planted at Miriam Vale, in a region from Caboolture to Bundaberg, at Kilcoy and in the Lockyer and Brisbane Valleys. The seedlings to be propagated are eucalypt species including blackbutt, Gympie messmate, spotted gum, white gum and a rose gum hybrid. Not only will this initiative help provide a secure future for Queensland's hardwood industry but it will also stimulate growth in the nursery industry.

I return to Wilson Tuckey. In Queensland, we can be grateful that he had nothing to do with the historic South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement. In Mr Tuckey's home State, the RFA has been disowned by the coalition State Government and the conservation movement.

In conclusion, I reaffirm the importance of this Bill. The objective of the Bill is to amend the Forestry Act 1959 and, specifically, to implement part of the RFA and extend legislative exemption to the provisions of the Commonwealth's Trade Practices Act 1974. Those objectives relate to managing State-owned forests to ensure ecologically sustainable development, to achieve efficient production and wood distribution and to promote the stability of the processing industry, including ensuring security of supply.

The contribution of the honourable member for Maryborough was worthy of consideration. Once the honourable member for Maryborough thinks this issue through and understands what this Government is about—trying to give our hardwood timber industry security and certainty—I hope that he will reconsider his decision to not support the Bill.
