



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 20 July 1999

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (6.36 p.m.): I say to the Deputy Premier that his Government has achieved another record in this State: it has united the graziers, the timber industry and the AWU workers against it. The Government has achieved getting 3,500 people, timberworkers from the timber towns, sufficiently united to protest in Brisbane. It was the biggest protest since the Vietnam War. I congratulate the Government.

The Minister for Primary Industries said that he has been out talking to people. If that is so, why did 3,500 protest outside Parliament today? The Minister has not been talking enough. These people are not the strikers or professional layabouts who turn up at most protests. These people do not tie themselves to trees and bulldozers. They do not float around on wooden boats on the Brisbane River. They are ordinary mums and dads who would never dream of strike action. They are good, honest-living people. Why on earth would they come down here if there was no problem?

The Minister has taken the RFA process from a scientific process to a political one. When I commenced the RFA process for south-east Queensland, it was a genuine process designed to get it right. The Deputy Premier runs around the State saying that we should have finished the South East Queensland RFA within the proposed time frame. It took longer than was first suggested, and I make no apology for that. It took longer to get it right, and so be it. We would have preferred to have put it in place before members opposite came into Government, but we did not do so. We could not do that, because we had to work through the process.

The Deputy Premier spoke about finding the RFA forgotten in the bottom drawer. That is untruthful and irresponsible. We moved heaven and earth to take into consideration all of the opinions of the people involved. Most importantly, we looked to the best methods of forest management to enhance productivity and ensure the conservation values of the forest. The one big factor that came out of the negotiations was that productivity could be improved. This was identified and had to be explored further. We could not cut it off halfway through. No-one realised that these gains were there. It was only after they had been right through the process that they found they could do much better.

If productivity could be enhanced, it would mean that no jobs would need to be lost and there would be opportunities for value adding. Also, more confidence would be given to the community. The Government's sleazy deal with the Greens for preferences has seen it backtrack on the gains that have been made in the RFA negotiations. It is prepared to sell timberworkers, graziers and communities down the drain because of its deal with the conservation movement. It is prepared to sacrifice scientific assessment for political gain. The Government has misrepresented the truth in the RFA process.

The Minister for Environment said a while ago that 60% of the resource is sourced from private land. But will he guarantee that 60% will still be able to be sourced from private land after he goes through this latest exercise in relation to the vegetation management group? Will he guarantee that all of that 60% will, in fact, still be there?

The graziers who lease land in the RFA region have also faced uncertainty. There are over 700 such leases in the south-east Queensland region. A group called the High Range Lease-Holders & Graziers Association formed in March 1998. They saw as the key issues security of tenure, the management of invasive Eucalypti, fire as a management tool and not as a destructive force, and

public involvement in planning and policy development as outlined in section 5 of the Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management Report.

Leases for the grazing of cattle in State forests were granted so as to maintain the open nature of those blocks which historically were lightly timbered. The grazing of cattle and the management of land for grazing was a cost effective way of maintaining the openness of the bush by reducing the undergrowth that arose when the logging disturbed the ground and for the control of fires. None of the scenarios put forward in the directions report offer any comfort to those communities. There will be at least 500 jobs lost in the logging industry, but there is no estimate of the job losses which will occur within the grazing industry and the effects on those small towns. The Government has not done enough work on the grazing side of the issue. Already further job losses are indicated with local abattoirs being unable to source sufficient cattle.

Time expired.
