



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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Hansard 25 March 1999

**CYPRESS INDUSTRY, WESTERN QUEENSLAND**

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (6.23 p.m.): National Competition Policy was not an issue in relation to cypress pine until it was raised in the press recently. At the departmental level it should not have been an issue. The Minister knows that as well.

**Mr Beanland:** Who signed this National Competition Policy?

**Mr HOBBS:** The Goss Government here in Queensland supported it. This briefing note, given to me when the coalition was in Government, states—

"... the Public Benefit Test presently underway as part of the National Competition Policy review of the Forestry Act 1959 is expected to indicate that the anti-competitive elements of the System are not substantial."

So what has happened? Maybe it was not officially signed off. There is no doubt that NCP would not have affected mills. Why has this situation developed? Why is NCP suddenly bobbing up in mills where it was not an issue before? I suspect that the lure was the extra \$1m the department would have received had National Competition Policy been implemented. The Minister knows about the bean counters as well as I do. I know exactly how they operate. The Minister may not have known it, but he was set up.

Even the figures have changed. The public benefit test shows quite clearly that the situation is different from when the coalition was in Government. Labor set this up and got caught out. To put the best spin on the situation after it got caught out, it had to stage an event. Then the Premier had to make a statement in the House to say that everything is all right. We have seen the Premier make statements about things that are supposed to be there but are not. We had an instance of that this morning. This Beattie Labor Government is the Goss Government revisited. The hallmarks are there. We saw what happened under the Goss Government and we are now seeing it again.

This Government does not give a damn about rural communities. I will explain how the NCP process operates. The Minister must go through the relevant legislation to see whether anything is anti-competitive. If something is found to be anti-competitive and it can be fixed up straight away, that is fine. But if something is found to be anti-competitive and it cannot be fixed up straight away, then a public benefit test has to be undertaken.

The socioeconomic tests show quite clearly that jobs cannot be taken out of these timber towns without creating a huge economic disadvantage to them. No-one in their right mind would have done that. Why did Labor members go out to these places and say, "We are going to give you NCP. We are going to take away your jobs"?

Labor members have said that the conclusions of the public benefit test state that the size of social impacts and the adjustment costs of relocating resources between the regions are unclear. The consequences of that are very clear. The Government's own people have set it up in relation to this issue. A little while ago the Minister said that people out in the region have been trying to talk to the coalition since 1996. Those opposite may have forgotten that Labor was in Government from 1989 to 1996. I am the local member, yet nobody has come to me to say, "I have a problem with NCP."

**Mr Palaszczuk:** They couldn't find you out there.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is absolute rubbish. I have been to all of those mills. I was there with the Minister at the opening of the new mills. There are two new mills being constructed in the area. Not one person has mentioned this issue to me. So why did it suddenly come up? I think the Minister will find that he has egg on his face, as has his department.

The coalition in Government extended those sawmill agreements for one year because everything came at once—NCP, the Trade Practices Act changes, native title and a regional forestry assessment. That is why the new licences could not be issued at that time. However, there is now no reason the Minister cannot do it. In fact, there is no reason for not issuing 20-year licences now.

I congratulate the industry stakeholders on the work they have done in putting together the sustainable cypress management strategy. As Minister for Natural Resources I provided funds towards that strategy. I think the Departments of Environment and Primary Industries also provided some funds. Virtually a mini RFA has been done out there. That having been done will save a lot of time and effort down the track. The Minister's people have let him down.

Time expired.

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