



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

---

Hansard 13 April 1999

### FORESTRY INDUSTRY

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (6.24 p.m.): The regional forest assessment ensures that Australia's forests are managed in an ecologically sustainable way. That is important for small towns' long-term survival, as they are the backbone of many rural communities. To assess the impact of the RFA process, there is a requirement to undertake an evaluation called the social assessment report. This report highlights the critical contribution that the native forest timber industry makes to local and regional communities. In some cases, small towns, graziers, farmers, jobs and families are totally dependent on the harvest of native forest timber.

In the South East Queensland RFA, the current allocation levels generate over 1,036 direct industry jobs and native forest based industries are worth \$74m a year. There are directly 872 timberworkers and indirectly 162 workers in harvesting and transport operations. The native forest timber mills spend \$56m each year on operating costs. A sum of \$25m is paid to the workers, who spend \$19m of it on household expenditure, most of which goes straight back into their local communities. A sum of \$31m is spent on plant and equipment, royalties, transport, repairs and maintenance. The economic lifeblood of 35 towns are the timber mills and their workers, families and processing plants. Those 35 towns could suffer catastrophic down line impacts from reductions in the sawlog allocations.

Rural communities have much to fear from the Labor Government's modelling assumptions in the RFA process and stakeholders being locked out of meaningful consultation processes. The Labor Government closed down the open and accountable process and subsequently curtailed meaningful participation by the stakeholders in the RFA process, and it knows it. Labor has taken this course of action to limit the exposure of its modelling parameters and it has used restrictive assumptions to deliberately appease conservationists.

A further independent assessment states that there is some doubt as to the appropriateness of both the theory behind and the application of the sustainability indicator. There is also significant doubt as to the application of the sustainability indicator to the allocation zone level as the indicator of sustainability.

**Mr Welford:** Do you understand that?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes, I do, although obviously the Minister does not. The Labor Government has used the most negative and conservative constraints in every instance possible to run the SKED models to establish a sustainable sawlog supply of 83,309 cubic metres. The actual sawlog allocation from Crown native forests in south-east Queensland is 108,791 cubic metres.

The independent assessment states that some of the most critical assumptions relate to parameters that are to be decided as part of the RFA, such as silviculture, sustainability criteria and return time. Therefore, it is inappropriate to suggest that the most negative view of these parameters should be seen as a starting point for the RFA. This means that job losses and the backbone and lifeblood of rural communities will be broken and lost.

By using different and equally valid assumptions, the model comes up with 150,000 cubic metres per annum as being the sustainable sawlog supply. Independent assessments of the model used by the Labor Government have supported this estimate. If the Labor Government is a

Government for all Queenslanders, including those involved in the timber industry and their families, and the Government is concerned about their survival and the down line effects on them, it will re-run the model and will do the following: look at the minimum return times for forest harvests, look at the impact of removing the constraints on basal areas and re-examine the way that the computer model treats the duration of supply. It should do that and see what happens.

**Mr Elder:** Why didn't you do that?

**Mr HOBBS:** We were going through that process, and the member opposite knows that as well as I do. It is an enormous professional process that one cannot do quickly. If one wants to do it, it has to be done properly.

The amount of sawlog allocation will directly impact on the 35 towns and communities in the south-east Queensland area, which is why the figures must reflect the correct parameters. The social impact assessment also has some serious flaws. The Labor Government is currently carrying out a desktop social impact assessment that only identifies direct impacts, that is, those involving timber workers. The indirect effects and flow-on impacts on businesses such as those that supply plant and equipment and the impacts on community infrastructure—that is, schools, hospitals and Government services—are not being taken into account as they should be. This social assessment is inadequate and not comprehensive. For the average person in Wondai, Linville or Blackbutt, it does not give a true indication of the impacts. The Labor Government has a responsibility to minimise the social impacts and job losses for the 35 towns affected, rather than appease the conservation movement by focusing on simplistic arguments based on the misuse of figures.

Time expired.

---