



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard 20 July 1999

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (6.46 p.m.): Today the forgotten people of the forestry industry have come to Parliament to publicly express their concern for their future in the industry. They came from as far away as Monto and Eidsvold, having spent seven hours in a bus from 3.30 this morning. As I speak, they will still be many hours away from home. For many, their return journey will not end until after midnight. I wish them godspeed and I congratulate them on the job they did today.

Over 3,500 people, none of whom are used to public protesting, came to put their message to this Labor Government and the people of Brisbane with a peaceful and well ordered street march. This was not the usual collection of rent-a-crowders and professional protesters who we more typically see involved in street marches. These people have given up a day's work, have spent money that many could ill afford and who, in the case of Eidsvold residents, shut down their community for a whole day so that they could come down here and voice their concern for their future. These are people much more at home in the bush than marching in city streets. They are more at ease with physical work than debate, but they came to Brisbane today to call for a finalisation of the RFA process in line with the provisions of the original motion that was moved here tonight. What response did they get? The same arrogant response that this arrogant Government has given them all along!

In Monto, the community that I am proud to call home, there have been three large public meetings to discuss the RFA. Each time, the Monto Shire Council has invited many representatives from the State Labor Government, including the Deputy Premier. Each time—three times they have been invited—no-one has attended. Not only did the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Natural Resources not attend any of those meetings, but they could not even send a staff member or a departmental representative. However, the ultimate display of arrogance was visited on those people from the threatened timber communities by the Premier this afternoon. He refused to meet a deputation of mayors from those threatened timber communities. He refused an invitation to address 3,500—

Mr ELDER: I rise to a point of order. Those remarks are untrue and offensive. The Premier did, as I did. I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! The Minister finds them offensive. I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr SEENEY: I withdraw. Neither the Premier nor the Deputy Premier was prepared to meet a deputation of mayors. What they did was wait until the crowd dispersed and there were only about 50 people left—

Mr ELDER: I rise to a point of order. Those remarks are offensive and untrue. An offer was made both by me and the Premier to meet a deputation of mayors. I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr SEENEY: There is no point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. They said, "We will meet a deputation so long as it is held at the same time the march is taking place."

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Callide will resume his seat! Under Standing Orders you will withdraw the remarks that were offensive to the Deputy Premier.

Mr SEENEY: I withdraw. They hid in the House—peaking around the corner, waiting for the crowd to disperse—then slipped out into the forecourt when there were about 50 people left and tried to

steal the show for the purpose of the TV cameras. It was a display of unbelievable gutlessness on the part of the Premier and the Deputy Premier—unbelievable gutlessness and cynical manipulation to try to steal the TV headlines, the unbelievable gutlessness and cynical manipulation that is so typical of the falseness and the shallowness of the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the whole Labor Government.

That behaviour is in keeping with the whole approach that this Government has adopted to the RFA process to date. For this State Government, the RFA is about green ideologies. It is about academic theories and it is about factional deals—factional deals that the Deputy Premier cannot win. It is about media opportunities and it is about information manipulation. It is about perpetuating half-truths and outright falsehoods.

The RFA process should be about forests. More importantly, it should be about people. For the people from the threatened communities who made the trip to Brisbane today, the RFA is about their whole lives—the lives of their families and their futures. The RFA should be about protecting timberworkers and their families—skilful people who have accumulated generations of knowledge in forestry work that is now ignored and belittled by the ideologists in this arrogant Government.

The RFA should just as importantly be about rural communities and their futures. Today those rural communities, led by their mayors and councillors, were here to make their voices heard by a Government that has treated them with contempt in the past and that treated them with contempt again today. The Deputy Premier refused to meet with them and refused to speak to them. He hid in the precincts of the House until they had dispersed—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr SEENEY: Then he snuck out into the forecourt—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr SEENEY:—to try to steal away the television headlines.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member under Standing Order 123A. The honourable member's time has expired.
