



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 28 October 1999

**APPROPRIATION BILL**  
**Estimates Committee G**  
**Report**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (3.43 p.m.): That pathetic attempt at addressing the Primary Industries portfolio as dealt with at the Estimates committee is an accurate indication of just how well this portfolio is understood by those on the other side of the Chamber. I struggle to remember an attempt at addressing this Chamber that was more pathetic than the one we just witnessed.

I am pleased to rise to make some comments on Estimates Committee G. I will direct my comments to the answers given by the Minister for Primary Industries as they related to the purchase of the interests of Boral as part of the regional forestry agreement and the establishment of hardwood timber plantations. There is growing concern in timber communities that, for all the fine sounding words, the State Labor Government is more interested in the politics of this issue than in providing any real future for the timber towns and the people who depend either directly or indirectly on the industry.

I take this opportunity to call again on the Government to provide some much-needed detail to fill in the gaps that exist so that we know what is being proposed for the future of the timber industry. A lot of detail needs to be provided about how some parts of that agreement are to be achieved in the hard world of reality.

Of particular concern to me are the timber mills at Eidsvold and Theodore, both currently owned by Boral and both proposed to be purchased by the State Government and on sold to another operator. The only reason Theodore is involved is that it is currently owned by Boral and is therefore caught up in the deal with the Government to purchase Boral's operation completely. Boral was never involved in the RFA area, nor does the mill source timber from that area. The Eidsvold mill is not located in the RFA area either, but it does draw some timber from that area. Despite continual assurances from the Deputy Premier in this place, following the RFA agreement Eidsvold now faces a very uncertain future.

Both mills and their dependent communities have certainly not shared in the false euphoria generated by the proponents of the RFA agreement. Both Eidsvold and Theodore will see their timber mills purchased by the Government and then supposedly resold to another private operator. That sounds fine in theory, especially if people are expounding that theory from the isolation of George Street. In reality, it raises many issues that have caused and will continue to cause concern to the workers and the members of the general communities in Eidsvold and Theodore.

Those communities need a guarantee that their mills will be on sold with a dedicated and inseparable timber allocation—an allocation that is sufficient to ensure the mills' survival. That allocation must be sufficient in terms of quantity and quality. Most importantly, they need a guarantee that the allocation cannot be transferred to another operation somewhere else. If they were, these operations would become targets for other mills, who would be seeking to transfer the quota to boost themselves. If that occurred, the end result would be the loss of mill jobs in Eidsvold and Theodore—mill jobs that are critically important to the economic base of those communities.

If there is any honesty in this RFA deal and if this Government is fair dinkum about any of the rhetoric that it has continually sprouted in this place, then the people who work in the timber industry in Eidsvold and Theodore will be given some hard answers. They need some detail that they can make

some measured judgments on. They need some facts that they can rely on and make some decisions about in relation to their future. They certainly do not need any more political rhetoric. They do not need any more smoke and mirrors tricks.

I believe, and I said at the time, that the RFA was a political deal worked out on the 15th floor in George Street and sold by a battalion of smart PR people and a compliant urban media. Now five weeks have passed and there is a growing realisation that the reality is in the detail and there is precious little detail to be had.

Another issue raised at the Estimates committee hearing was the establishment of hardwood plantations. There are a great many questions left unanswered in this area as well. Where is the money to establish these plantations and where are they proposed to be located? If the mills throughout Burnett's towns are to survive in the long term, then some of these plantations need to be located in the Burnett region. Already there has been much talk from the Government about the jobs involved in establishing and maintaining those proposed plantations, and the jobs they would provide would be very valuable to many communities in the Burnett. Not only would the jobs contribute to the economic base, but locating the plantations there would also ensure the future of the mills at Eidsvold, Theodore, Mundubbera, Monto, Mulgildie, Wondai and Allies Creek.

I take this opportunity to urge the Government to seriously consider the Burnett region as a location for the hardwood plantations that are to be established as part of the RFA. I call again for a great deal more detail to be provided to give some substance to the RFA and to give some guidance to the people of the timber communities who are dependent on the great timber industry.

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