



Speech by

**Hon. J. ELDER**

**MEMBER FOR CAPALABA**

---

Hansard 20 July 1999

### **SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT**

**Hon. J. P. ELDER** (Capalaba—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade) (6.15 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"Delete all words after agreement and insert—

'Based on an increase in jobs through the development of a world class timber industry incorporating a high level of value adding, downstream processing, improved productivity, a comprehensive, adequate and representative system and expansion of softwood and hardwood plantations with adequate financial support from the State and Commonwealth Governments.' "

The whole point of the RFA was to get the community together to talk about how to best use the timber resources. As a Government, we have kept an eye on that as an outcome so that we finish with a balanced solution and that that balanced solution is in the best interests of the community as a whole. There is no way that everyone in the community is going to be satisfied, simply because there are two points of view that are diametrically opposed. However, the role of parliamentarians is to resolve difficulties in the interests of all members of our society.

It is disappointing to note that, although there has been a lot of goodwill and reason from people involved in the debate, that is, members of the timber industry, timberworkers and conservationists, the politics have been played very hard by those opposite, particularly those in the National Party who wanted to get back the vote of those who at the last election voted for the One Nation Party. In relation to that issue, the problem is that those members opposite have a history; they have form. I will repeat it one more time in this House. In 1997, Rob Borbidge signed an agreement with John Howard which locked us into an RFA process. In that agreement, the Opposition agreed to implement the RFA by the middle of 1998. However, when the Opposition was faced with the choice of doing its duty to the community or trying to win political points, at that time it chose to win political points.

**Mr HOBBS:** I rise to a point of order. The Minister is misleading the House. That is not true. We were prepared to go through the process and do a professional job.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr ELDER:** The fact of the matter is that the Opposition chose not to do its duty to the community; it tried to win political points. In the meantime, there was a press statement by the then Premier paying tribute to Aila Keto and the Australian Conservation Society. Brian Littleproud, the then Environment Minister, told a conference of conservationists that the Borbidge Government was getting in place an RFA and that it was a great achievement of that Government.

So in Government, the coalition thought that the RFA was great; it was fantastic. The then Government said that it had an outcome. However, there was nothing: there was no outcome, there was no agreement with the Commonwealth; it was all rhetoric. When the Opposition had to take on this issue in the electorate, because it knew that it had to take on One Nation in the affected parts of the State, it squibbed it. So where has the hard work gone? It has gone straight back into the too-hard basket for us to deliver.

The hard work is now being done, and it is hard work indeed. It is not flashy and it is not, as a number of members opposite are doing, a matter of running around the State, particularly in the south-east, telling the conservationists that they can get everything that they want and telling those people in the bush that they will get everything that they want. That was highlighted by the effort of the member for Callide in Monto, who told the people what they wanted to hear, knowing full well the truth in relation to the issue.

It is a crying shame that members opposite have not been prepared to play a constructive role. If they were prepared to do so, they would support the Premier and me in our attempts to seek a boost to the Commonwealth funding that we receive. Former Premier Borbidge boasted that he received \$10m from the Federal Government at a time when Tasmania was given \$110m, Western Australia was given \$140m and New South Wales was given \$60m. Premier Borbidge was boasting that he got \$10m. The fact of the matter is that we need the same sort of Commonwealth funding that those States received so that we can move ahead with plantation timbers and value adding in the industry. Only 28% of the timber that leaves this area is actually value added in the area. The Government recognises that more needs to be done in terms of a commitment to the plantation timber industry and more needs to be done to drive value adding opportunities. With biotechnologies and biosciences driving the types of solutions that we can achieve in this area, it is quite possible to get a balanced long-term solution for those who want our forests to be protected, and for those who want to see the expansion of job opportunities in the forests and who want to work in the timber towns, and at the end of the day for the towns to be viable. Members opposite should stop playing politics—

Time expired.

---