



Speech by

Hon. J. ELDER

MEMBER FOR CAPALABA

Hansard 26 October 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Regional Forest Agreement

Hon. J. P. ELDER (Capalaba—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade) (10.25 a.m.), by leave: Honourable members would be aware of the very positive reaction within the community to the Queensland Government's proposal for a Regional Forest Agreement. The list of groups which support the proposal includes the Queensland Timber Board, the Australian Workers Union, the Queensland Conservation Council, the Wilderness Society and the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society. In addition to these peak bodies, there has been significant support for the proposal from the wider community, especially those areas generally recognised as timber towns. This is because they realise that this proposal offers them 25 years' security, then a solid, long-term future—a considerably brighter future than is on offer in any other State through the RFA process, which I remind honourable members is a joint Federal/State process.

We are, however, acutely aware that some timberworkers will be disadvantaged by the proposal, particularly those at the Boral mills at Nandroya and Cooroy, which will close between October next year and the end of March 2001. This is necessary to preserve the high-conservation areas of the Mapleton State Forest and the Conondale ranges. This Government is committed to providing jobs for those people who currently work at the mill. Currently, Boral employs 30 people at its mill at Nandroya and 24 at its board plant at Cooroy, while a further 26 individuals will be impacted on to varying degrees by the Boral exit. I stress that, in the last category, some of the affected individuals do not live in the Cooroy region, but they still will be affected by the closure of the two mills.

The day after we announced the Queensland Government's proposal for the RFA, the Government opened an office in Cooroy to assist the workers there to gain further employment. Since that time, officers of my department have held meetings with the Australian Workers Union and management representatives from Boral Ltd regarding redundancy payouts and a joint approach to finding jobs for the displaced workers. We have also been working closely with the key stakeholders at Cooroy, including the Noosa Shire Council, the Cooroy Chamber of Commerce, Boral Ltd and timberworkers themselves, to investigate further new job and economic development opportunities in the timber industry and other sectors. This includes two public workshops on 5 and 19 October 1999 respectively to identify local development initiatives in eco-tourism, education and timber recycling. The Cooroy office has also been contacted by several investors with both timber and non-timber-related proposals for the current mill sites at Cooroy and Nandroya, which is a further positive indication of the strong support our RFA proposal is receiving in the business community.

We are also working closely with the Noosa Shire Council and the Cooroy Chamber of Commerce in the development of a strategic plan for Cooroy. But the main work of the Cooroy office is in placing individuals currently employed by Boral in alternative work. This involves the hard slog of talking to all those affected workers. So far, 14 have been interviewed, while 54 local businesses have also been interviewed. The office has liaised with all local financial institutions to arrange free personal finance seminars on 3 and 17 November 1999 for all of those workers.

In the light of all this activity, the appearance of the Leader of the Opposition at Cooroy, in a cynical attempt to cash in on the fate of those displaced workers, was about as predictable as Fatty Vautin tipping Manly in the match of the round. Given that the member for Surfers Paradise wants to

scrap our RFA if he wins back office, could he also tell the people of Queensland if he also proposes to scrap the 471 new jobs that come with it? Could he also tell us if he proposes to log the Conondale ranges and Mapleton State Forest? And could he also tell the timber industry if he proposes to wind back the 25 years' security for the timber industry? I doubt it. He could have had a bipartisan approach, but he has gone after a destructive approach.
