



Speech by

JOHN KINGSTON

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

Hansard 7 December 1999

FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—IND) (8.52 p.m.): In his second-reading speech the Minister said that the RFA will ensure job security. Let us have a look at another facet of this industry. For many years, forestry reserves have been leased to graziers for grazing a defined number of cattle. These graziers have acted as unpaid caretakers for the Department of Primary Industries (Forestry) in what was a synergistic relationship.

I had a forestry lease for many years. My men were there almost every day. We maintained roads, crossings, fences, controlled feral animals and weeds and paid rates. Currently, these SGP holders do not know if they will be in business in the future. There are 115 SGP holders within the Maryborough forestry district alone. What is obviously not understood is that many of these family businesses own a small area of freehold land and have a large area of forestry lease. As an example, one Maryborough SGP holder owns some 200 acres of freehold land and relies on 40,000 acres of SGP land.

In general, if these SGP holders lose secure access to their forestry leases, they will lose critical mass and, thus, viability. So much for jobs! SGPs have been regarded as having adequate security for them to be traded. Recently, some SGPs sold for around \$500 per beast area. I ask: is the Government going to compensate the current lessees for loss of their leases, their viability and, in many instances, the investment of many years of family labour?

The Maryborough district forest SGP holders, who lease 510,000 hectares, met on 15 June and on 17 June wrote to the chairman of the SEQRFA CRA unit enunciating nine points concerning the payment of rates by SGP holders as shire income, the proven benefits of silviculture, the progressive reduction in carrying capacity caused by Department of Primary Industries (Forestry) restrictions on weed control and burning, the increased fire risk and so on.

This SGP meeting unanimously adopted two recommendations to the RFA CRA unit. Those motions essentially said, firstly, that secure grazing access should be maintained with minimal restrictions except for the already accepted responsibility to enhance the national estate and, secondly, that dismay was expressed at the insensitive and inflexible Queensland Department of Primary Industries management restrictions which are not maximising cattle or timber production, to the disadvantage of the national estate. Further, those at the meeting asked that they be involved in the development of self-regulating codes of practice. The SGP holders asked for consultation. The receipt of their submission was acknowledged but, despite further attempts to establish dialogue, they have been ignored. So much for consultation!

These families spend almost every day on their SGP land. The health and productivity of that leased land has a direct impact on the future welfare of their families, so they do not abuse it. The uncertain future of the SGP's, and concern for the timberworkers, caused a petition of 806 signatures from the residents of Wide Bay to be presented to this House on 10 June 1999. I ask: who listened? Who responded? Nobody!

Independently, the Gaeta and District Progress and Landcare Association presented a similar submission to the Government. Additionally, the high range leaseholders centred at Kilcoy—supported by the Kilcoy Shire Council, the Esk Shire Council, the Kilkivan Shire Council, Agforce and the Local Government Association of Queensland—made submissions and asked for further consultation. They stressed the flow-on effects within their communities. Meanwhile, the Premier and the Deputy Premier

were somehow extracting the backbone from the QTB executive—two dedicated and strong personalities. Obviously, the opinions of rural shires counted for nought. Effectively, they were disfranchised.

The Friends of Jimna and Conondale Range Committee responded to the paper titled A Directions Report Towards a South-East Queensland RFA and associated documents with a submission which is cynically and, unfortunately, accurately predictive of the situation today. Among the points they made are the following.

Firstly, one of the JANIS provisions— values protected by prescription—appears to have been ignored in the consideration of management. The second point was as follows—

"Since practically all the State forests have been logged once, and much of the area given silviculture treatment, and are still considered suitable for inclusion in a CAR system, there is no argument put forward as to why State forests cannot continue to be managed for forest products under a prescription system."

Sadly, this is so reminiscent of Fraser Island. The third point is—

"This prescription approach would allow for responsible forest management with a continuation of employment opportunities in forest management, logging and processing industries—within a CAR reserve system. Such prescriptions would only be an extension of the current codes of practice."

The fourth point is as follows—

"There is no evidence that past logging or silvicultural treatment history has been taken into account in the development of any of the scenarios proposed. Scientific studies in the Conondale Range forests have found that there is no significant difference in the fauna in logged and unlogged forest areas. It was also found that the effects of logging are short term with a very small impact over the whole forest in any year."

The fifth point is as follows—

"There is no guarantee that placing a forest in a CAR reserve system will sustain the biodiversity status for which the area was reserved. In all ecosystems, there is a progression to an ecological climax. We are aware of a recent study undertaken by DNR/DOE which warned of this process and advocated its consideration in assessing the long-term likelihood of maintaining the current biodiversity. It is interesting that this study has not been included in the papers made available for public perusal."

The sixth point is as follows: forest management provides infrastructure, such as roads, for general forest users. Tourism benefits, and can coexist with sustainable forest management.

The seventh point is as follows: they were cynical of eucalypt plantation proposals. They pointed out that the hoop pine plantation establishment started before 1920; that harvesting of natural stands of hoop pine did not cease until the 1980s, that is, a lead time of 60 years. I ask: where is the lead time in the current proposals?

I share their lead time concern. On my own grazing property, I have one of the few second-generation trials of eucalypt species and cultivars. Those trees are only 18 months old and insect pests are already obvious. For many years, I have monitored the QDPI trials at Toolara forestry without finding any cause for excitement. A senior forestry and ex-QDPI researcher, consulted about the current plantation proposals to have plantation hardwood ready to replace the current harvest from State Forest reserves stated categorically that currently QDPI was eight years away from having the proven technology to undertake the responsible establishment of hardwood plantations.

The RFA backbench committee visited Kilcoy and Maryborough, but did not inspect the variety trials and the results of silviculture—impressive stands of timber nurtured by graziers practising silviculture and, lately, habitat retention. The land owned by these graziers is producing four times more sawlogs than forestry country just through the fence. Some families have been doing this for three generations, and their timber production is increasing.

I have worked with farmers, graziers and timbermen all my life. I am acutely aware of the accumulated wealth of knowledge and wisdom that they have acquired the hard way. They are an underutilised resource, often ignored by people with a better, but narrow, formal education. I am sure that the member for Gregory, if he were here, would agree.

Having consistently asked for consultation, including many letters to the Minister—none of which were acknowledged as far as I am aware—the members of the three SGP groups were surprised and dismayed to stumble across an invitation from the DNR Forest Planning and Sustainable Use Unit in issue 35 of Between the Leaves in September 1999, inviting the formation of registers of interested people in the development of seven codes of practice. The Maryborough SGP group wrote to Rebecca Williams and John Kelly, as suggested. Practically, there is considerable overlap within the

implementation of these codes. To a large extent, it is impractical to consider them separately. A holistic approach would be more productive. This suggestion was made to the Planning and Sustainable Use Unit. Their reply is still anxiously awaited. Such behaviour makes one wonder if the title "public servant" is still applicable.

In summary, regarding consultation, I submit to the House that consultation has been and continues to be woefully inadequate, confined and concentrated. I sincerely hope that that concentration has been on a truly representative and non-threatened source. The Minister claims that his purpose is to improve security of supply. I want to assure the Minister that the security that this process is creating in rural communities is not bankable. In fact, some commercial banks are already questioning the security provided by SGP holders. Additionally, in the future, when a radical TV crew films a State forest logged down to 40 BHD, as is now suggested, then there will be an outcry from the environmentalists and timbermen.

I would like to touch on a critical point: hardwood plantations. I have worked in and inspected many plantations of *eucalyptus camaludensis* in South-East Asia and Indonesia, planted for seven-year pulp rotations. I can assure the House that progress has not been without hiccups, despite the heavy involvement of leading CSIRO scientists and Savannah Machinery from Yandina. However, it is a comfort to know that Australia has this experience with pulp production in countries wherein the common predators of eucalypts do not occur.

I have a very serious concern about the restriction that the plantations that will replace State forests have to be on already cleared freehold land. The price of such land is significant and the current availability is low. I am aware of one company that is already experiencing difficulty finding land to undertake their own ambitions. Earlier in this debate, the Minister announced that a recent report had shown that land was available from Miriam Vale south. In actual fact, the report by ABARE and the Bureau of Natural Resources stated that there was adequate land that was suitable following soil and rainfall analyses, but for it to be available, the current owners have to be prepared to sell at a reasonable price. I ask the Minister: once he has guaranteed supply to the timber mills, and this is known publicly, what does he think will happen to the value of land within those three broadly defined areas? I hope that the Minister and forestry companies have deep pockets and that the Minister has thought about the chance of class actions if the Government cannot fulfil its promise of 25-year security. Conversely, the production of timber by silviculture is so much cheaper and involves no land disturbance and, thus, no deep ripping and, thus, no release of soil-stored carbon dioxide. Biodiversity is greater under mixed species forests, but mixed species plantations are difficult to manage and harvest. The technology for silviculture is already known and practised. It involves the multiple use of land. Multiple land use is regarded as desirable by international agencies, such as the Commonwealth Forestry Group and FAO, through the Tropical Forest Action Plan, the World Food Security Program and the Non-Petrochemical Energy Program.

I now wish to go back and refer to the origins of this debacle, the National Forest Policy Statement 1992. It is an agreement between the Commonwealth and State Governments on broad goals for the management of Australia's forests, with the dual aims of conserving the natural and cultural values of forested areas and developing a dynamic and internationally competitive forest products industry. The word "dynamic" is encouraging. With the goals of the NFPS in mind, the QTB, the AWU and the FPS developed their Regional Forests Development plan. It brought together three crucial elements for the future management of SEQ forests, namely, improved native forest management, a transition towards plantations, and a reserve system expanded by 200,000 hectares, making the reserve system comprehensive, adequate and representative. This tripartite plan maintains wood supply to industry at current allocation levels whilst maintaining the structure and quality of the forest in the long term. In response to this plan, many small mills indicated a preparedness to invest upwards of \$1m each to improve their value-adding capacities and to undertake more efficient log conversion. Larger mills have indicated a willingness to invest in excess of \$10m.

An indication of the industry benefits of this plan can be obtained from ABARE's economic analysis of the various scenarios. There will be 300 more direct jobs and a \$15m per annum increase in production. Rod McInnes, Selena Walters and various AWU representatives did a magnificent job of selling the plan, which generated tremendous support but suddenly disappeared from the agenda. I know that the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the QTB executive continued to have back-room weekend meetings. What ultimatum was given to two men whom I respect that made them suddenly capitulate? They capitulated in the interests of urban votes, giving no thought for the negatively impacted rural communities and the dedicated timbermen.

All the rural people who were in favour of this plan were disfranchised. The night before the Premier's Solomon-like announcement QTB members were advised and were led like innocents to the slaughter. With the passage of time and more serious consideration, most of the mills and all of the councils have changed their approval to disapproval. I know that many millers are too scared to speak out for fear of retribution.

I finalise this contribution by issuing a challenge to the Government. Aila Keto is not well regarded in serious scientific circles, but she has had a tremendous impact on the Bill. I challenge the Government to employ a world-renowned environmental scientist who is acceptable to the millers, the silvipastoralists, the graziers and the Government to examine this scheme and the suddenly abandoned tripartite industry scheme, and then abide by his recommendations. I can provide the name of one of the deservedly most respected natural resources scientists in the world. If the Government is not prepared to seek such independent opinion, it must accept the criticism levelled at it by the member for Callide that, basically, it does not give a damn about the rural electorate.

To encourage the Government to agree to an independent mediator, I seek leave of the House to table two graphs of expected sawlog supply. The top graph is an estimate of sawlog supply resulting from the tripartite agreement that councils supported. The bottom graph shows an estimate of sawlog supply resulting from the Bill that we are debating. The bottom graph illustrates a crippled timber industry.

Leave granted.
