



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

Hansard 20 July 1999

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Mr SPRINGBORG (Warwick—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this Parliament supports a South East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement which promotes the successful development of a viable and sustainable native hardwood industry through—

- (a) jobs growth in forest industries;
- (b) resource security through 20 year guaranteed access to crown native forests;
- (c) improved management of native forests through enhanced silviculture;
- (d) State and Federal Government support for plantation development and value adding initiatives; and
- (e) a scientifically justifiable comprehensive, adequate and representative forest reserve system."

Today, we saw hundreds, if not thousands, of very concerned people who live in the logging regions of south-east Queensland descend upon Brisbane to send a very clear message to the Government of this State. These people indicated to the Government that they want to make sure that their industries, their livelihood and their communities are sustained into the future. I would like to commend those people for the way in which they conducted themselves in bringing their message to the parliamentarians and people of this State. I commend those people for the way in which they put forward their message.

The south-east Queensland native hardwood industry is sustainable. The United Nations is using Queensland expertise to improve forest practices overseas. The industry underpins 44 rural communities and 1,200 jobs direct. In many towns it is the sole major industry on which the rest of the community relies. That was the reason why those people descended on Brisbane today. They wanted to make sure that the legislators of this State saw and heard their message.

The RFA process was originally intended to take politics out of the forest industry and to provide the timber industry with the long-term and secure wood supplies it needs to develop, invest in their businesses and create more jobs in rural and regional Queensland, and Queensland in general. It was also intended to provide better management of our forests, to provide for enhanced silviculture and better use of wood supplies in value adding and alternative uses, and to provide a scientifically based, comprehensive, adequate and representative forest reserve system.

The coalition Government was committed to delivering a sensible, scientifically based RFA and commissioned research to ensure that the decision was based on science and not on emotion or ideology. The Borbidge Government had developed a genuine spirit of cooperation and consultation with all the stakeholders—evidenced by the signing of the scoping agreement which enjoyed widespread support. Notably, with the change of Government that consultative committee ceased meeting. The committee was not required by the Beattie Government. The Beattie Government had its own agenda. It had a pre-election preference deal with the extreme Greens to pursue.

Despite the rhetoric on jobs and governing for all Queenslanders, the Beattie administration was only interested in getting into office any way it could. Those opposite have not been interested in

achieving a consensus as was occurring under the Borbidge Government. That is evidenced by the fact that this matter has gone on and on. It is also evidenced by the amount of division in the community on this issue. Those opposite shut the stakeholders out from the development of the job destroying directions report.

The Government insisted that the two most extreme options be included—to shut down 500,000 hectares and to shut down 620,000 hectares. This Government says that it is interested in the timber industry. However, it did not have to include those two very extreme options in that report. Because they were included in the report, there must have been an intention to bring one of those options into being. The Government's so-called best option calls for half of those 1,200 workers to be sacked and for their livelihoods and the livelihoods of their families and communities to be subsequently destroyed.

The Ministers responsible for the RFA could not be bothered getting out and learning about the industry, talking to the people and seeing the forests. Instead, they sent out a delegation of backbenchers. Whilst it is very important that backbenchers have an appreciation of the issues involved—and they probably went out there with open minds and wanted to do what they could about bringing the community's concerns back to Brisbane—the real matter here is the commitment of the Executive, the commitment of the Cabinet and the commitment of the Government. Now that the heat has been turned up by those forest industries and the rural and regional communities—and rightly so—suddenly the Premier is appealing for compromise. Suddenly the Premier is appealing for all the parties to come together and talk it through.

Why did the Premier shut those people out after the State election? Why did he shut them out of his backroom negotiations in drawing up the directions report? The Premier and the Deputy Premier are appealing for compromise. Today, we saw the extreme Greens' idea of compromise on the banner behind their hired aeroplane. The aeroplane was flying around and around Parliament House towing a banner which read "Stop logging our native forests". That is hardly a compromise. That is the sort of agenda which has been captivating the minds of many members opposite. It is that sort of compromise that the Premier and the Deputy Premier want.

Is the Deputy Premier going to desert his Australian Workers Union faction—those hundreds of workers who put him where he is? Where is he when it comes to delivering a compromise? Many AWU workers who are concerned about their future were among the people outside Parliament House today.

We saw a pathetic attempt to hose down today's protest in the Government's wishy-washy talk in last week's Courier-Mail of boosting plantations. The Deputy Premier claimed "the only way to protect the environment was a major boost in native plantation forestry." He refused to rule out a ban on logging in native forests. Today, the Premier refused to rule out banning logging in native forests. In fact, the Premier has clearly enunciated that his preference is for this warm and fuzzy transition policy from native hardwood forests to plantations. It is an admirable objective to boost plantation resources, and the Borbidge Government made many gains in plantation development and farm forestry initiatives. But it is naive in the extreme to expect this conversion in 20 to 35 years. Any of us with any understanding of these issues would understand that some of those areas, depending upon their capacity, will take much longer to come on line.

Let us look at some facts. There are currently over 620,000 hectares of Crown native forest available for logging. The January 1999 report of the Bureau of Resource Sciences and ABARE entitled *Hardwood Sawlog Plantations for Selected Areas of South-east Queensland* contains some interesting findings. The land capability assessment undertaken by the study identified some 200,000 hectares of cleared agricultural land that is capable of supporting blackbutt and Gympie messmate for plantations. It also identified some 250,000 hectares of drier land for spotted gum in the north coast, Kilcoy-Woodford and Gympie supply zones. That sounds all right so far.

But then—and this is the significant bit—it found that, despite the large area identified as capable of supporting hardwood plantations, only 5,355 hectares are economically attractive when the potential returns from competing land uses are taken into account. Further, the proportion of this land likely to be made available for plantations is small due to a host of impediments. Topping the list of impediments would have to be the massive uncertainty created by the Beattie Government regarding its intentions to restrict clearing on freehold land and its refusal to provide a guaranteed right to harvest. As well as that, there are the general market uncertainties, the risks associated with such large and long-term investments, and the size of optimal areas of land for economies of scale.

So there is a bit more to it than the Premier really has tried to explain to this Parliament and a bit more to the fuzzy headlines that he has been seeking to gain of late in the newspapers and in other media. If the Premier were truly serious, he would have addressed it in his directions report. He would have provided some details about how he was going to remove these impediments. He would have pulled his Natural Resources Minister into line and ruled out his planned bans on timber harvesting on freehold land. Instead of simply adopting his usual cop-out of blaming the Federal Government and

appealing for big bucks to buy out timberworkers' jobs, the Premier would have removed the uncertainty that the Labor Government has created.

I say to the Deputy Premier that timberworkers are not depending on getting \$50m from the State Government. They want a guarantee from him of long-term wood supply security and a guarantee that no jobs will be lost.

Time expired.
