



Speech by

**Mr LEN STEPHAN**

**MEMBER FOR GYMPIE**

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Hansard 30 November 1999

### **FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr STEPHAN** (Gympie—NPA) (12.56 a.m.): It gives me great pleasure to join in this debate on the Forestry Amendment Bill, although it is very sad that we have to debate this subject under these circumstances. Anybody who knows anything at all about timber would know that it is slow growing. We cannot just put it in the ground one day and come back in two or three years and think we are going to get a tree. It just does not happen that way. As with all other living things, trees go through the cycle of growth, death and decay. Each of those stages is a very important aspect of the growing program and of the use of the timber.

I can mention a number of the stands that we had over a period of time. I remind the House of the amount of timber that was taken out of Fraser Island, for example. People who go there now would not know where that timber was taken from. It is the same in Cooloola. The growth in the trees there was phenomenal. It was handicapped only by the fact that the process which the Government put in place was not a natural phenomenon but one that we have to work around. In those areas, the only thing stopping harvesting is the will of the Parliament to put in place a process to get something out of those stands.

Other speakers have commented on the hardwood and plantation timbers. The messmate at Pomona has now been harvested. Those trees were nowhere near full growth. They could have been there for another 30 or 40 years. Those trees were planted back in 1948. So under those sorts of conditions, and realising that those trees have been there for 40-odd years, that is something that we can be proud of and learn from. I do not think that there are any stands of that particular type of timber around Brisbane. But it is no good our turning a blind eye and not going down that path.

I remember using messmate timber on the family farm. One of our houses, which was built in the mid forties, was built with messmate from our property. The timber stands were so substantial that the millers themselves had to come down and have a look at the wood to see for themselves what they were able to do with it. We can all be proud of that—not because that messmate was ours but because it was utilised and will continue to be utilised for many generations to come. I would like to think that the amount of timber being harvested from that area will be sustained for a very long time.

If one wants to find out what is happening in the timber industry in other countries, one need look no further than South Africa, which is learning from us very well just as, indeed, we can learn from it. There appears to be scope in Australia for the development of a new plantation forestry strategy to increase commercial timber plantations, especially eucalypt plantations, but we need direction and a goal to work towards.

In considering this possibility, it is interesting to compare Australian plantation resources with those in South Africa. The two countries have similar graphical and climatic conditions. Both countries produce commercial softwood—pine—and hardwood timbers, and they do that very well indeed. An evaluation of the plantation industries in both countries shows that South Africa has a commercial timber industry which is considerably more advanced than Australia's. We should learn from South Africa—to our advantage as well as South Africa's. This is especially so given that the entire South African land mass would fit comfortably within the State of Queensland, and considering that South Africa's timber resource industries, like those in Australia, are predominantly centred on European countries. There is a clear need to increase plantation forestry in Australia, especially hardwoods, if the

environmental concerns of an increasing number of voters are to be considered seriously and overcome.

Plantation forestry in South Africa dates back over 100 years, but it developed rapidly during the last 30 years. That should give members an idea of which way that country is heading. Both countries will continue to develop along the same lines. South Africa was once ranked the 12th-largest pulp producer in the world and the 22nd-largest paper and paper board producer. By the mid 1990s, South Africa was expected to be among the top 10 pulp and top 15 paper and paper board producers in the world. It is a major exporter of timber products, including woodchips, pulp, paper, paper board and processed timbers. It is also using other types of timbers, including wattle. Wattle has not previously been considered as a timber of any great consequence. However, it does grow prolifically, and it does make an impact. It can look after itself for quite some time without needing any attention or anybody to look after it.

I turn now to some comparative statistics between Australia and South Africa in order to see just how alike the two countries are. For example, the total area of commercial plantations in Australia is nearly one million hectares. In South Africa, the figure is 1.1 million hectares. The total area of privately owned plantations in Australia is 300,000 hectares, which is similar to the figure in South Africa. So the situation in the two countries is much the same, and I am sure that we can learn from that.

In relation to environmental management, I congratulate the Department of Primary Industries, Forestry, which is Queensland's principal forest grower. It is regarded as a leader in forest management. It certainly does a fantastic job. Its record on environmental protection is substantial, and it is an expert on forests, plantations and farm forests.

A lot of work has been going on in farm forestry, but it has been going on very slowly. I would not like to give any indication that farm forestry is paying many bills. There is a long way to go. Some people prefer to put their dollars and cents into it and look to the future for their sons and daughters. These people have been working in the forests for a long time. We must ensure that we have sustainable timber production. That will go a long way towards developing other industries.

I will leave it at that. As I pointed out, we have a long way to go. It will not be an easy row to hoe. With a lot of support and a lot of hard work I believe that we will be able to continue with the forestry plantations and with the forests themselves. We have to put our heads down, and away we go.

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