



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard 20 July 1999

SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.51 p.m.): I would like to return a bit of calm to the House. The case of the timber industry and its need to continue logging in State forests has been clearly articulated outside this House today. We know of the fears of workers, business owners and residents in those small rural communities such as Wondai, Dingo and Linville. We know that they believe their towns will die if logging stops. I have heard those concerns personally as a member of the consultative backbench committee. Nobody can fail to be moved by these decent, hardworking people as they talk about the fear of the future for their families and their communities. If those were the only interests that the Government had to consider, our task would be easy, but they are not. There are other legitimate interests that the Opposition knows about only too well. That is why it was not able to conclude the RFA. It knows how difficult it is.

I remind members opposite of those other interests, because they have been expressed to us with as much passion as have those of the timberworkers, and they cannot be ignored. Here I am talking about the beekeepers, the horse riders, the four-wheel drive vehicle owners and other recreational users. I am talking about the foliage harvesters and the ecotourism operators. Not all of those uses are compatible with intensified logging—the so-called enhanced silviculture.

Mr Mickel interjected.

Dr CLARK: I have heard this foliage harvesting industry referred to derisively as flower picking, but the member for Logan was right when he interjected: it is a tremendous industry that is growing very fast—a \$4m industry that employs some 70 people. Enhanced silviculture has driven that industry out of New South Wales. It is not compatible with that industry. Similarly, if they were able to have more access to State forests, ecotourism operators could expand that industry to a much greater extent, earning far more dollars for regional communities.

Honourable members would have read in yesterday's Courier-Mail about indigenous interests. They feel that their interests have been ignored, and they cannot be ignored. They are native title holders. They are traditional owners and we have to factor them in to this issue as well.

I turn now to conservation interests, which generate so much heat in this place. It is interesting that the conservationists are not making money from our forests. They actually do not benefit personally. The other legitimate industries I have described all have vested interests, but what do conservationists have? It is something that is very hard for people in this House to understand. Conservationists have a commitment to see forest ecosystems preserved for their own sake. They actually take on board the scientific information that was described by the Minister and they are responding to that information—the irrefutable, scientific, independent studies that tell us that, when compared to forests in all other States, south-east Queensland forests have the largest number of species of plants and animals. They actually have the greatest biodiversity. It is also irrefutable that our forests are the least protected and that they do not meet the JANIS criteria, even if all our State forests are included.

We need to talk about whether the Opposition is prepared to ignore all of those other interests, because we are not. We recognise the need to consider all of those interests and we know that they do have to be taken into account. That includes the people in the survey referred to by the Minister, which also supports the conservationist view.

We are going to tackle all of those interests—not by dividing up the forests amongst competing interests but rather by embarking on a major plantation and agroforestry industry to create long-term security for the timber industry and at the same time allow for the expansion in State forests of the other industries and activities that I have talked about, such as ecotourism and foliage harvesting, which rely on preserving biodiversity and which actually create jobs and make money.

Time expired.
