



Speech by

LINDA LAVARCH

STATE MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

Hansard 7 December 1999

FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (9.13 p.m.): Enough is enough. We have listened to hours of scaremongering from the other side and now it is time to put some sanity back into this debate. On its face, the Forestry Amendment Bill 1999 is a relatively simple Bill. It contains only seven clauses and essentially deals with only two time periods. One time period is of 25 years for the granting of a sales permit for getting native forest hardwood sawlogs under the native forest sawlog allocation system for south-east Queensland. The other time period is of 10 years for the extension of the legislated exemption from the provisions of the Trade Practices Act. The current exemption expired on 27 November this year, which was a great day as it was my birthday. However, the affect of those two time periods is of most vital importance, because they are an essential part of the regional forest agreement which, in turn, is essential to providing the much sought after security for the hardwood timber industry.

It seems to me that some Opposition members are bitterly disappointed that there has not been community discord about the regional forest agreement. They are bitterly disappointed because they wanted a re-enactment of the situation that occurred when Western Australia first had a go at putting together a regional forest agreement. Mr Borbidge, the Leader of the Opposition, so desperately wants the RFA to fail that he will go to any lengths to undermine the agreement. Members opposite are being childlike. They are jealous that, since the RFA was signed, there have not been huge howls of protest on the streets of south-east Queensland.

Obviously because the stakeholders are standing by the RFA and working towards its implementation, the coalition is doing everything in its power to tear it apart. The speeches of its members are thickly laden with words and phrases that expose the fact that they are trying to undo the agreement and whip up a political storm. They are trying to manipulate the communities in the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement region and are irresponsibly promoting and inducing feelings of insecurity when no such feelings need to be felt because of the RFA. They want the communities to feel insecure and they will do everything in their power to stop them from prospering and feeling confident about themselves. The Opposition is trying to create conspiracies where conspiracies do not exist.

In fact, the Nationals are desperately trying to win back their heartland from One Nation. They think that by playing yesterday's politics, they can out gun One Nation. They think that they can "out nation" One Nation. They think that by talking the language of insecurity and alienation, they are talking the language of the people living in the affected communities. However, tonight I give the coalition members a tip. If they think that those tactics of community manipulation and that style of politics will win back votes in towns like Wondai, Linville, Woodford, Maryborough, Peachester and Mapleton, to name just a few, they are dead wrong. They are on the wrong track. The tactics that they have displayed throughout the debate on the RFA, especially since the election of the Beattie Government, have shown clearly that they still do not understand why people in Queensland and in National Party seats turned to One Nation. Until they listen and learn from their mistakes, they will continue to occupy the Opposition benches.

Essential to understanding the feelings of insecurity is understanding that people do not like dishonesty in politics. At the start of this debate, the shadow Minister for Primary Industries, Russell Cooper, was so blatantly dishonest in his speech that I interjected, asking for someone opposite to be

honest. Again, I ask for members opposite to be honest about the timber industry, the RFA and the RFA process. One and a half days of debate has taken place since I asked for someone to be honest and so much nonsense has come out of the mouths of those opposite that it will take us a week and a half to set the record straight.

As part of the Opposition's political tactics are a number of charges that it has made against the Government. The charges are numerous and I will try to list them. They are as follows: firstly, they say that the State forests do not have 25 years of sawlogs supply. That is nonsense. Secondly, they say that there has been no science used in formulating the regional forest agreement. Again, that is nonsense. Thirdly, they allege that there has been a behind-closed-doors sleazy deal. In fact, they say that there has been no agreement. That is wrong. Fourthly, they allege that there has been no consultation. Fifthly, there has been scaremongering that there will be mass job losses and town closures. Sixthly, they said that the cypress pine industry will be under threat. Underlying all of the charges laid by coalition, One Nation and ex-One Nation members is the notion that in some way the Beattie Government has conjured up a process called the regional forest agreement to cause maximum harm to timber towns and that it has all been some sort of a con. The short response to each of those charges is: what absolute rubbish!

Members opposite do not let facts get in the way of a good story. Firstly, in relation to the regional forest agreement—

Mr Veivers interjected.

Mrs LAVARCH: The way members opposite talk, I do not think they appreciate that it is an agreement. They seem to think it has been imposed on people.

When the member for Western Downs, Brian Littleproud, was the Minister for Environment, he issued a press release on 5 May 1998 proudly listing as the first and major achievement of the coalition Government in respect of environmental issues the first State regional forest agreement. He was half right; it was an interim agreement. The Borbidge Government started the regional forest agreement process back in 1997 and was supposed to have it completed by 30 June 1998, but they squibbed. They well understood the scientific reasons why a regional forest agreement is needed, but it was just all too hard. It is ridiculous for them to deny the need for such an agreement now.

On 16 March 1998, Mr Borbidge, the then Premier, announced proudly in a press release that on that day he had signed an interim agreement with the Commonwealth to protect the conservation values and timber industry interests in the forests of south-east Queensland. He said that this agreement had been achieved as a result of unprecedented cooperation between the Commonwealth and State Governments and particularly between the timber industry and the conservation movements. He went on to say that there was no doubt that some difficult decisions had to be made, but both sides had worked with the Government with the single aim of achieving good outcomes for the community. He went on further in that press release and paid special tribute to Dr Aila Keto, of the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, and Rod McInnes, of the Queensland Timber Board, for their leadership and commitment in that process. Those are two of the same signatories to the full regional forest agreement signed on 16 September 1999. What has changed over the past 18 months? What has changed for the Leader of the Opposition to claim now that Dr Keto and Rod McInnes are no longer proper representatives to sign an RFA?

Let us look at some of the charges in further detail. There has been extensive consultation. I know that, because I was part of the consultative team. During May, June and July of this year, together with the members for Logan and Barron River, I spent many days on the road visiting and listening—and I stress: listening—to as many stakeholders as we could get to, including sawmillers, millworkers, AWU representatives, indigenous representatives, local government, beekeepers, forestry workers and graziers. A number of speakers from the Opposition said that there has been absolutely no consultation with the graziers.

Mr Cooper: They will tell you that themselves.

Mrs LAVARCH: That is incorrect. There has been extensive consultation and there is ongoing consultation. I point out that the Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources held a meeting with non-timber stakeholders, including graziers, on 28 October 1999. There were numerous meetings leading up to the RFA being signed and there have been meetings since. Those meetings have been to discuss the implementation of the Queensland plan. There were ongoing negotiations with Agforce regarding the process for the renewal of stock grazing permits and term leases for additional conservation reserves.

We also met and listened to contractors, foliage collectors—and what a great success story Cedar Hill Orchids, at Palmwoods, is—and the recreational forest users. Again, I wish to point out that there have been ongoing consultations with the recreational forest users. Again, in November last year the Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources convened a meeting with the Forest Recreation Reference Group to ensure that its concerns were considered. The Minister also

met with them again on 27 October this year and reiterated his previous assurances to the Forest Recreation Reference Group that there would be further consultation prior to the final tenure allocation for additional conservation reserves. The Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources has indicated to recreationalists that his aim is to have no net loss—I repeat: no net loss—of recreational opportunities in the south-east Queensland region. Going further, we met with environmental groups, tourist operators, businesses and locals. We listened and we reported back on what they were telling us. Many of the issues raised were addressed by the RFA. Much has been alleged by members opposite about consultations with local—

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! As pleasant as it is to see the member for Crows Nest back in the Chamber, it was much quieter without him.

Mrs LAVARCH: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It was obviously my charm that brought him back.

Along the way, there have been direct meetings and consultations with all local governments in the south-east Queensland regional forest area. Leading up to the signing of the RFA and even on the very day that the Premier announced the Government's plan for the South East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement, a concurrent meeting was also arranged by the Deputy Premier's office to provide a briefing on the RFA plan for all of the local government authorities in the region. Terry Mackenroth, the Minister for Communication and Information and Minister for Local Government, Planning, Regional and Rural Communities, chaired that meeting. Six mayors representing the shires of Beaudesert, Caboolture, Cooloola, Esk, Noosa and Woocoo, together with some of the councillors from those shires, were able to attend the briefing. Officers from the Forest and Timber Industry Task Force have subsequently had further contact with a number of local government authorities in the region, and more detailed mapping information showing State forests and new conservation areas has now been provided to most of those authorities.

There was another meeting on 22 November 1999 with 19 mayors, together with the councillors and support staff, at the Wide Bay/South Burnett/North Burnett combined region association meeting held in Maryborough.

Mr Veivers: What date was that?

Mrs LAVARCH: That was on 22 November 1999.

At the meeting in Maryborough, the Mayor of the Cooloola Shire provided an invitation for senior members of the Forest Timber Industry Task Force to be present at a meeting on 29 November. There is no truth to the charge that there has been no consultation. There has been wide and continued consultation.

Mr Veivers interjected.

Mrs LAVARCH: The member for Southport is admitting that there has been consultation.

Much has been said about Boral and the job losses there. Speaker after speaker said that 80 jobs will be lost. Yes, there will be some job losses. With the closure of Nandroya and Cooroy, 53—not 80—full-time jobs and 25 contractor positions will be lost. Boral intends keeping its administration processing centre at Nandroya operating, and this will result in the continuation of the existing 22 jobs. The Government is moving directly to create jobs in plantation and conservation estate management and is working with the private sector by providing incentives to also create plantation jobs and jobs in value adding. These opportunities will deliver an estimated 471 new jobs, including 241 jobs in softwood value adding, of which 191 will be around Maryborough; 30 in the Laminex MDF plant at Gympie; 100 in plantation establishment and management; and 100 in conservation estate management. As honourable members well know, the Government has established a shopfront in Cooroy to deal with the workers' inquiries regarding employment opportunities on a one-to-one basis. Staff at the centre have already had discussions with over a third of Boral's workers. As we speak, the union and the workers from Nandroya and Cooroy are currently negotiating with Boral on the redundancy agreements. The Queensland Government will find jobs for displaced timberworkers in timber and timber related occupations.

Another point raised by the member for Warrego related to the cypress industry.

Mr Cooper: That has nothing to do with the RFA.

Mrs LAVARCH: Well, I ask the member to tell that to the member for Warrego, because he raised it. He kept saying that it was under threat. It is not under threat. The coalition did not provide them with the security. This Government has delivered security and certainty to the cypress pine timber industry. In October the Minister for Primary Industries officially opened a new million dollar sawmill in Mitchell. It will employ 15 people and process timber for growing export markets. Members opposite know that well. They know that the State Government is committed to the cypress pine industry, which is part of a healthy and sustainable native forest industry in Queensland.

Time does not permit me to address all the other allegations that have been made, but I know that other Government members will address them in full. In conclusion, I can say that the South East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement will result in an unprecedented 25-year guarantee of Crown native hardwood supply at current levels. One of the greatest causes of risk to the Queensland timber industry will be removed by support for this Bill. I urge all members to support the Bill and show their support for the communities.
