



Speech by

**Dr PETER PRENZLER**

**MEMBER FOR LOCKYER**

---

Hansard 25 March 1999

**CYPRESS INDUSTRY, WESTERN QUEENSLAND**

**Dr PRENZLER** (Lockyer—ONP) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this Parliament unequivocally reject any attempt to destroy the western Queensland cypress industry by the application of National Competition Policy principles; and

Further, that this House provide a guarantee to that industry that no action will be initiated or allowed which will cost timber workers their jobs, employers their businesses and rural towns their future."

The nefarious National Competition Policy has once again reared its ugly head in regional Queensland. In Saturday's Courier-Mail we learned that the State bureaucrats in this jobs, jobs, jobs Labor Government have decided that the current system of cypress forest allocation to millers in western Queensland breaches the Trade Practices Act and—surprise, surprise—does not comply with the National Competition Policy. So what?

If we want to allocate our cypress milling rights to locals in order to provide 2,000 jobs in western Queensland, we should be able to do so in spite of the National Competition Policy. We are the Parliament of the State of Queensland and we are sovereign, not Canberra. Whoever can grasp that concept will govern this State for a very long time. Our most important function as members of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland is to create jobs for our constituents, and it goes without saying that we must prevent the destruction of existing jobs by crazy economic policies such as these.

I agree with the Premier that the National Competition Policy has to be changed or, better still, thrown out. It is up to us to force Canberra to do that. Is it not strange that most of the damage resulting from National Competition Policy is inflicted on the bush, yet the Labor Party is leading the charge while the Federal coalition sits twiddling its thumbs, completely ignoring the Queensland Nationals?

Cypress is a native softwood species found in the more isolated areas of Queensland west of the Great Dividing Range. Of locally produced timber, approximately 44,000 cubic metres of sawn cypress is consumed by Queensland and the remainder is exported interstate or internationally. Cypress pine, along with native hoop pine and native hardwood, make up approximately 85% of Queensland produced and consumed sawn timber used by the Queensland construction industry. It is reported that the cypress industry generates \$30m annually, providing almost \$3m in royalties to the Queensland Government. It employs approximately 2,000 people, supports a large number of families and keeps entire towns alive and functioning. Inglewood, Millmerran, Cecil Plains, Chinchilla, Miles, Taroom, Wandoan, Injune, Rome, Augathella, Mitchell, Mungallala, Dulacca-North and Surat will all suffer terribly if we do not resist this economic tyranny.

For example, the timber industry supports 231 people of a population of 400 in the township of Injune. This town will be completely destroyed if we allow the cypress industry to be shut down. Collectively, the cypress industry pumps over \$30m into the economies of these towns each year. We will be getting only a lousy \$40m from Canberra this year for selling out the people of Queensland to the National Competition Policy. We will lose \$30m of that straightaway if we do not protect the cypress industry. Any benefit the Government receives in the form of higher royalties would be more than lost in supporting the 2,000 newly unemployed people and their families.

It should be obvious to all that no public benefit test is required in this instance. For the sake of 2,000 jobs, maintaining the status quo is not only the best option but the only option. If we fail to protect this industry, property values will plummet, people will not be able to sell their houses or businesses, investment will dry up and credit will be harder to obtain. Shops will close and depopulation will occur in these already depressed western towns.

Although I was encouraged by the Premier's comments, I was disappointed to hear him trying to deflect the blame onto the Opposition for not making the Federal coalition change the National Competition Policy. It is the Premier's responsibility and duty, not the Opposition's, to defy Canberra when the circumstances warrant it, as they do now. It is the Premier who formed the Government, not the Opposition, and it is the Premier who must stick up for what is best for Queenslanders.

We must ask ourselves: why are we here? Is it to provide jobs, jobs, jobs for rural Queenslanders, or is it to satisfy some crackpot economic theory from Canberra? Do we want free trade or fair trade? We need to resist the Federal Government when it is wrong. The answer and the course of action we must pursue is obvious. On Tuesday the Premier announced very proudly that several new film industry deals in Queensland would generate about another 2,000 jobs. Whether these are actually new deals or not has been the subject of considerable debate this morning in the House. That is good, because those jobs will almost compensate for the 2,000 jobs that would be lost in western Queensland if the Government caves in to the economic gurus and reforms the cypress industry.

Unfortunately, the lost jobs in the timber industry are much more substantive than the maybe jobs in a fickle industry such as the film industry. We must stop the destruction of our primary and secondary industries. We must stop blindly following nutty theories when the evidence clearly shows that they are not working. Few people would not concede that the National Competition Policy is not working very well. What State, or country for that matter, has ever become wealthy from tourism or hospitality at the expense of its primary and manufacturing industries? Historically, primary industries have been the great wealth building industries and providers of secure employment in this country. They continue to be in decline and in their place are emerging part-time, low-skill, dead-end jobs on which it is not possible to raise a family or build a home.

The decline in our industrial and manufacturing bases has been caused by policies and decisions that have emanated from Canberra. It has created the economic climate that causes social and personal tragedy and we have to clean up the mess. The Federal Government has buried us on the level playing field and we have to pick up the pieces. This is all the more reason why the Queensland Parliament must transcend party politics and fight together for the people of Queensland.

The western Queensland timber workers, and in fact Queensland families in all rural electorates, are depending on us to protect their way of life. They are depending on us to force the Federal Government to cease the vicious and ongoing assault on their industries, jobs and lifestyles. We already see the future of the native hardwood industry under severe threat due to the conservationists' hijacking of the regional forest agreements. We cannot afford to allow yet another timber industry to be destroyed by senseless economic rationalist policies such as the National Competition Policy.

Naturally, at the moment members representing rural electorates such as my electorate of Lockyer are constantly fielding calls from extremely concerned constituents who genuinely fear for their futures in the timber industry. Why should the jobs of our timber workers or any other jobs be sacrificed on the altar of free trade?

---