



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 17 September 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Regional Forest Agreement

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.31 a.m.), by leave: Yesterday was an historic day for Queensland with the signing of an agreement covering south-east Queensland's precious native forests. This agreement is a win for the timberworkers and the communities in which they live, and a win for the environment. Not only do we protect existing jobs; we also generate a net increase in jobs.

At the same time, I am announcing a 25-year strategy that sees a complete end to hardwood logging in Crown forests and a switch to plantation hardwood forests with new value adding industries. Let me repeat that at the end of 25 years there will be no hardwood logging in State reserves but—and it is a big but—the timber mills will continue to operate, using hardwood from plantations which my Government will plant. South-east Queensland's timber towns are safe. They are here to stay, as are their schools, their ambulances, their fire stations, their police stations and their sense of community.

A key element of this agreement is the State Government's decision to buy out the hardwood operations in Queensland of Boral Limited. This allows the State Government to shift some of Boral Limited's hardwood logging applications to smaller mills, thus guaranteeing their survival and the survival of workers' jobs and the towns and communities in which they live. The remainder of Boral Limited's logging applications go into State reserves, and that means protecting our precious environment.

This agreement is just another example of my Government's style of negotiation and consultation—not confrontation. My Government's style is delivering positive results. We did it on native title, and now we have done it in order to protect timber industry jobs and to protect our native hardwood forests.

My Government is prepared to make the tough decisions. We have done it in relation to native title, RFA, prostitution and the stadium. This is a Government that is prepared to make tough decisions.

Whilst this is not technically an RFA, I have spoken to the Prime Minister about compensation payments and, despite reported comments from his officers, I remain confident that an arrangement between the Commonwealth and the State will be given favourable consideration. I do not believe that the Prime Minister is not prepared to help save workers' jobs, let alone turn his back on the communities in which those workers and their families live. I believe that John Howard is committed to these communities. This is a strong commitment by my Government to these communities. We need funds from the Commonwealth to support these communities. Today, I call on Mr Howard and his Government to support us with \$30m towards this program.

Either way, my State Government is committed to ensuring the success of this historic agreement between the timber industry, the environment movement and the State Government. This is a model for other States. We will not see a repetition of the shambles that we witnessed in Western Australia. This is a model which should apply in the rest of Australia. That is why it should be supported by the Commonwealth.

Now let us look at the detail. The agreement results in a gain of at least 350 extra new jobs—that is 350 net new jobs. They come from initiatives such as a medium density fibreboard plant in Gympie employing 30 people. There are 100 new jobs in forest management, a further 100 in

plantation management and 241 in private sector milling and value adding in Maryborough and north Brisbane. This offsets a potential loss of around 80 jobs.

In addition, my Government is putting up \$10m to encourage new investment in the value adding side of the hardwood sector. That means more jobs and more security for the timber towns of south-east Queensland. These towns are getting security out of this agreement that they never had before.

The agreement will also result in the planting of 10 million trees during the next five years. Let me repeat that—10 million trees planted during the next five years at a cost of \$18m. That is the future of Queensland's hardwood timber industry. This is a long-term transition to a timber industry based on plantation timber which, in turn, will set up a viable long-term hardwood timber industry for Queensland—not just for the next couple of years but for the next 50 to 100 years and beyond.

But the key areas of high conservation values that we need action on now will be saved. These include the Conondale Ranges and Mapleton Forest in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, as well as the Kroombit Tops area inland from Bundaberg. The extra 425,000 hectares added to the conservation reserve doubles its current size, and this will be increased to more than 1 million hectares by 2025.

The Government is working with several private companies to expand their operations, and I expect more announcements to be made in this area shortly. The Government is in the process of identifying suitable land for hardwood plantations and plantings.

As part of the agreement to stop logging in the high conservation areas in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, the green timber sawmill at Nandroya near Cooroy in the Noosa hinterland will cease operations from October next year. Boral's other holdings in Queensland at Eidsvold and Theodore—which take hardwood from the south-east corner but are outside the forest agreement area—will be taken over by the Government in 2002 and then onsold so that their ownership remains in private hands.

But we have not let the timberworkers or the communities down. This agreement will mean more jobs for the timber industry—jobs, jobs, jobs. This plan allocates \$10m to encourage value adding measures. At the moment, only 28% of timber in south-east Queensland has value added to it in the area. So those jobs in value adding are being created elsewhere. As proof of our commitment to value adding, we have announced a grant of \$80,000 for a feasibility study by a consortium of small timber mills at Woodford, Wondai, Gympie, Wandoan and Allies Creek. The study will examine a proposal for cluster processing of value added timber products utilising sawn timber from all of the participating mills.

In addition, we are going to need people to plant and work in the 5,000 hectares of plantations that we intend to plant so that there is a long-term future. Aside from the Boral plant at Nandroya, the other two mills that will not receive logging allocations at their current rate for the next 25 years are Finlayson's mill at Yarraman and Hyne and Sons mill at Dingo.

In the case of Finlayson's, the company will willingly surrender two logging licences and in return—and I stress "in return"—will receive assistance from the Government to expand their hoop pine operation both in Yarraman and in Brisbane. Their operation will strengthen. They are now going to be using new value adding technology in their Brisbane plant, which is not operating anywhere at all in Queensland, and that is going to mean an extra 15 jobs in Brisbane and an extra five jobs in Yarraman. So there are an extra five jobs in Yarraman.

The Hyne and Sons operation at Dingo will run for another 10 years, after which the mill will be closed and the 10 workers will be offered employment at Hyne's timber operations in Rockhampton. I had a discussion yesterday with the Minister for Public Works and Housing. He and I have agreed that, over the next 10 years, the Government will work to find a future for Dingo.

As I said at the outset, yesterday was an historic day for Queensland, an historic day for these communities, and an historic day for the forests of this State. It was just another example of the difference between my Government and the coalition, which promised everything and delivered nothing. My Government is delivering and we are working for Queensland.

When we were in Opposition, we gave our wholehearted support to any decision of the Government of the day which was plainly in Queensland's interest. There can be no doubt that this historic agreement has been hailed by conservationists and by the timber industry and is very much a positive development for Queensland. In fact, the support for this agreement by all the stakeholders is absolutely unprecedented not only in Queensland but also in Australia. However, this morning on ABC Radio news I was disappointed to hear the Leader of the Opposition in negative mode.

We now need a contribution of at least \$30m from the Federal Government towards the cost of implementing the agreement. This funding is available under a forest agreement, or RFA process.

Although our agreement is an improvement on the RFA process, it technically falls outside that process. I call on the Federal Government today to fund this agreement to the tune of \$30m. I also call on the Opposition to cease its wrecking tactics and to throw its weight behind this historic agreement, because this is a Queensland agreement for Queenslanders. I call on all members of this House to support this forest agreement and to support our bid for \$30m for the agreement from the Commonwealth.

I do not see how the Federal Government could refuse to support and provide funds of \$30m for this agreement on any grounds at all. I repeat: I do not see how the Federal Government could refuse to hand over the \$30m or more that is morally due to us if the National and Liberal Parties lobby their colleagues in Canberra. I call on the Opposition—I call on all members of Parliament—and I call on all Queenslanders to support this agreement and our bid for \$30m from the Commonwealth.
