



Speech by

**Dr PETER PRENZLER**

**MEMBER FOR LOCKYER**

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### **REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT**

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

"That this Parliament will ensure that the management plan for the Queensland timber industry will be based on scientific fact rather than emotion."

I wonder how many of the members of this House who support further restrictions on the harvesting of native hardwood forests actually know much about the forestry industry. If these honourable members have relied upon the information contained in the mainstream press on which to base their decisions, then they are doing themselves and the industry a great disservice, as the information is frequently biased and skewed against the industry.

Are members aware of the ideological forces that are driving the forestry debate in Queensland and other parts of Australia? Are members aware of the very unscientific approach used by many Government and non-Government organisations to make momentous decisions affecting thousands of jobs? Are members aware that the lobbying power of the often misguided environmental movement is far greater than the lobbying power of the timber industry? Are members aware that this industry in south-east Queensland supports some 3,000 employees and their dependants and has an estimated gross value of production of over \$100m annually?

Unfortunately for those Queenslanders and families who are dependent upon the timber industry for their livelihoods, almost all politicians have succumbed to the vastly superior lobbying power of the anti-industry element so that they now believe that Queensland is in imminent danger of having all its trees cut down by rapacious gangs of timberworkers with chainsaws. Fortunately, today we have this opportunity to refute those spurious arguments by presenting documented and credible research to prove that, in fact, Queensland's forestry industry is responsible and sustainable. Fortunately, we are able to speak on behalf of the people employed in the Queensland timber industry and to promote their interests.

The people involved in this industry are well aware that they have been outlobbied and outmanoeuvred and they are fearful that they will be thrown onto the unemployment scrap heap because this Government will sacrifice the industry at the green altar of environmentalism. We argue that it is not necessary to lose a single job by further restricting the native hardwood industry. On the contrary, we maintain that the entire forest sustainability crisis has been manufactured and fanned by various organisations both in Australia and overseas with dubious motives and using unscientific and emotional arguments. We believe that Australian Governments, both State and Federal, have been poorly advised and have relied on incorrect information from the start and that the RFA agreements and the premises upon which they are based are flawed, unscientific and will decimate our Queensland timber industry.

For 20 years we have been bombarded with false propaganda, which has resulted in wrong assumptions being made and wrong decisions being made, including the biased approach in the RFA process. I will give the House just one example of the bias and unrepresentative nature of the international decision-making process. As part of the United Nations Agenda 21 agreement, Australia is required to provide an annual progress report to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. In the report of the 7th session of the High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development, we find that the representative from Australia is a Mr Jorg Imberger, an academic, a

consultant to Government, and an adviser to EarthWatch. Who on earth is Mr Imberger? Who does he represent? What right does he have to negotiate on behalf of Australia? It is no accident that our industries are being dismantled. It has been planned and executed at an international level and our Governments exacerbate the problem by sending an anti-industry environmentalist to negotiate on our behalf.

One very interesting statistic that I have not heard mentioned by the greens is that of the 156 million hectares of native forest in Australia, less than 1% of those forests are harvested in any one year. This small proportion is regenerated following harvesting so a perpetual supply of native hardwood and softwood is available—just 1%, a minuscule 1%, and this is selective logging, not clear-felling. How well run is Australia's forestry industry compared with those in other countries? According to the Department of Primary Industries, Australia has 11.3% of its 156 million hectares set aside in conservation reserves. That percentage compares more than favourably with the global average of only 8% reserved. Even such extreme conservation organisations as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and the World Wide Fund for Nature suggest 10% of current forest coverage as a conservation target. Why is the Government insisting that we must sacrifice our jobs to satisfy the ridiculous target of 15% of pre-1750 forest cover when we already meet our international agreements without regional forestry agreements? Have our Governments reacted rationally, based on science, or have they acted irrationally, based on emotion?

The green extremist movement has also shamelessly exploited the issue of woodchips so that the politicians and the general public alike believe that exporting woodchips is a cardinal sin. The truth, of course, is that processing wood produces residue in the form of woodchips, sawdust, offcuts and flitches. A certain amount as residue can be sold domestically but the rest is surplus and if it cannot be exported, it has to be burned, producing lots of pollution and adding to our greenhouse problems. Every tonne of woodchips wasted means another area of clear-felled forest in the Philippines, Indonesia or some other developing country, such as Papua New Guinea. This is another example of emotion taking precedence over good science.

Another myth peddled is the fallacy that our so-called forest degradation began with the settlement of Europeans. The truth is that Aboriginals lit fires continuously, burning large areas of Australia and destroying an inestimable amount of forests, converting it to open woodland with large, widely spaced trees, a few woody shrubs and an abundance of grasses. The early settlers to Australia became aware of this when, in the 1880s, the cessation of firestick farming by Aborigines produced extensive regeneration of eucalypts and woody shrubs across these grasslands. So I am amused by all the emphasis placed on indigenous interests in the RFA process, since most of our forest destruction happened under the stewardship of the Aboriginal race. But, of course, that is politically incorrect history, and it is rewritten or censored whenever possible.

The Forest Protection Society predicts that even if the base scenario of locking up 156,000 hectares is adopted by the Government, 500 direct jobs will still be lost in the south-east, which will be a crippling blow to the timber towns in these areas. We contend that no job losses are necessary and, indeed, the expansion of the industry can occur and forests can still be preserved provided that better management methods are used. The report produced by the Queensland Timber Board, the Australian Workers Union and the Forest Protection Society contains interesting revelations that silviculture yields in northern New South Wales outperform closely equivalent Queensland yields by a factor of four. The report suggests that if the New South Wales management regime was applied to the industry in south-east Queensland, our forests could sustain an annual sawlog harvest of some 355,000 cubic metres per annum. That is certainly a far cry from the Government's pessimistic 83,000 cubic metres per annum. I have no reason to doubt this expert scientific research advice, but will the Government take notice of it? Even if this figure is only partly correct, surely it tells us that, given better management, no job losses are necessary and that the silviculture component of the RFA process is at least as important as the reserve system, which is given undue emphasis.

I conclude by referring to an interview between John Laws and Dr Patrick Moore, the founding member of Greenpeace, on 6 March 1996. In that interview, Dr Moore said that the green movement had been taken over by a very extremist element and it is unfortunate that the proof is there. Laws then asked how many true environmentalists had been hoodwinked. Dr Moore replied that far too many had and that the drift to the ultra Left and extremism was difficult to resist. Dr Moore then criticised the Wilderness Society for saying that, at that time, over 500 species of Australian wildlife were in danger of extinction because of logging. He then said—

"Not a single species, to the best of our knowledge, has ever gone extinct because of forestry in this country, or in my country of Canada."

Dr Moore then stated—

"I've driven from the very south-east up to as far as Port Macquarie, and I cannot believe that Australians are being duped into thinking that their forests are disappearing."

Members of this House should take notice of scientists of the calibre of Dr Patrick Moore. They should read carefully the dissenting reports produced by various organisations. They should also carefully consider the forest yields of other Australian States before they close their minds and close our forests.

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