



Speech by

Dr PETER PRENZLER

MEMBER FOR LOCKYER

Hansard 27 October 1999

TIMBER PLANTATIONS (HARVEST GUARANTEE) BILL

Dr PRENZLER (Lockyer—ONP) (10.22 a.m.): I move—

"That the Bill be now read a second time."

The purpose of this Bill is to encourage the establishment of timber plantations or farm forestry enterprises where trees have been planted for commercial timber production. In particular, this Bill seeks to provide certainty over the right to harvest the timber on maturity. In so doing, it performs some very important environmental and economic functions.

There is a very real need to encourage an increase in farm forestry. This activity has the potential to provide considerable employment opportunities both directly and indirectly, and thereby provide a desperately needed boost to flagging regional communities. Farm forestry will not flourish unless there are some incentives, the most fundamental being the knowledge that, when the trees are mature, there will be no impediment to their harvesting and sale. Appropriate provisions for the right to harvest are included in this Bill.

The establishment of timber plantations in Queensland will be achieved by means of an accreditation scheme which may include certain conditions that the owner or manager of the timber plantation must abide by. These conditions, along with compliance with harvesting codes applicable to the harvesting operations of the timber plantation, will ensure protection against damage to the environment.

The timber harvest guarantee is achieved through Part 4 of the Bill. Certain provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Integrated Planning Act 1997, the Local Government Act 1993 and the Nature Conservation Act 1992 will not apply to the harvesting operation to the extent that they prohibit or regulate the carrying out of the harvesting operation. A person carrying out the harvesting operation is exempt from complying with the excluded provisions but will remain subject to any other law that relates to the management or harvesting of timber.

Part 5 of the Bill details the functions and powers of timber plantation officers. Timber plantation officers, who are appointed by the chief executive, are responsible to conduct investigations to monitor or enforce compliance with both accreditation conditions and harvesting codes. Information is reported back to the chief executive on the officer's findings, thereby allowing the chief executive to pursue appropriate action to rectify any violation.

The chief executive may amend, cancel or suspend the accreditation of a timber plantation for any of the following reasons: the accreditation was issued in error; the owner, after the accreditation was granted, has been convicted of an offence against section 49 (compliance with harvesting codes); there has been a significant contravention of a harvesting code, and that contravention has not been remedied; the accredited timber plantation has been abandoned; the amendment, cancellation or suspension is necessary to protect unique or special wildlife values, for which compensation is to be paid to the owner; and harvesting operations have been completed and it is not intended to use the land for further timber plantation purposes.

As honourable members can see, sufficient safeguards have been incorporated to ensure the operational efficiency of the Bill. Accreditations for timber plantations remain in force unless cancelled or suspended by the chief executive, or surrendered by the timber plantation's owner. An accreditation is

not affected by a change in ownership or management, or the harvesting, removal or replanting of trees at the plantation.

The establishment of a farm forestry enterprise requires a major commitment of capital and labour. It is, by its very nature, a long-term investment, with any profit most likely to be realised by the next generation. It is absolutely essential, therefore, for an investor to know that the trees he is planting will be able to be used for the purpose for which they are intended; that is, to be milled for timber. In the meantime, those farm forestry plantations will be providing great value to the environment. Every tree that is planted will play a part in the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions—another reason why this activity must be encouraged and promoted.

Many regional communities in south-east Queensland will be devastated by the regional forest agreement. Many timber workers will be thrown out of work. To many of them, the timber industry has been their life. It is all they know. Farm forestry may not be the solution for all of them, but it has the potential to provide employment for some of them and provides an opportunity to utilise their skills and experience in a way which will benefit the workers and their communities.

Farm forestry must receive encouragement and incentives immediately. It will require at least 25 years—in many cases much more—for the trees to reach maturity and provide sawlogs. Many of the regional communities in south-east Queensland are largely (and in some cases totally) dependent on their sawmills. I have very grave doubts that the Government will be able to keep its promise of 25 years supply guarantee under the RFA, and many small mills will close.

For those that do survive, and for the communities that are dependent on them, supply from farm forestry sources will be vital. Therefore, farm forestry must be encouraged immediately, and the only way that this will happen is if far-sighted investors can be guaranteed the right to harvest which is provided by this Bill. I commend the Bill to the House.
