



Speech by

Dr PETER PRENZLER

MEMBER FOR LOCKYER

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FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL

Dr PRENZLER (Lockyer—ONP) (3.18 p.m.): On many occasions, members of One Nation and other members on this side have spoken about their disapproval of the regional forest agreement and its purpose. We do not speak against it lightly; we speak against it because hardworking industry people are against it. They are very passionate about that, because their livelihoods and their communities are at stake. They have a right to be passionate about this issue. Rationality does not seem to prevail. Every time something like this happens, they seem to get the raw end of the deal.

In his second-reading speech, the Minister stated—

"The Queensland Government plan was underpinned by an agreement between the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, the Queensland Conservation Council, the Wilderness Society, the Queensland Timber Board and the Queensland Government.

What sort of fair agreement is that? It is an agreement made between three conservation organisations, one industry body and the Government. One would not necessarily consider that to be a fair agreement.

This is especially so when the industry body, the Queensland Timber Board, is more representative of the big players and does not speak for a large number of mainly smaller timber industry participants. In short, the Queensland Timber Board is not the Queensland timber industry. Perhaps one of the reasons that we constantly disagree on the support or lack of support for the regional forestry agreements is because the workers in the industry may not be truly represented by the industry body. The fact of the matter is that regional forestry agreements will cause great devastation to many workers, whole timber communities and those involved in support industries.

While I agree that we must protect the environment and ensure a sustainable industry, we must not do so at the cost of closing down whole communities. If a sales permit agreement is to be made that would allow the continued harvest of the allocated areas for a definite period of 25 years, the Government must be certain that the allocated areas have enough resources so that industry participants can continue to sell their timber for 25 years, not for a part of it. However, this will not be the case. The areas agreed to are too small to meet logging demands, and it is inevitable that industry participants will suffer and be forced out of the industry. The evidence now coming forward from respected timber scientists, practical timbermen and experienced foresters within DPI Forestry is that the supply promise simply cannot be kept.

How many more times will Governments impose their distorted views on individuals? Education about environmental consequences, the growth of the green movement and the increased world focus on environmental procedures have changed the way that people think so that they are more far more conscious of the environmental impacts of their actions than ever before. The people involved in the industry are no different. Do members think that the majority of farmers would choose to rape and pillage their own soil knowing that eventually it will no longer produce a crop? Absolutely not! It is crazy to think that way.

I am sick and tired of hearing rubbish about the level of tree clearing in Queensland. That is just misinformation being peddled as scare tactics by ill-informed environmental extremists who have no knowledge and are so near-sighted that they do not even realise that, if they wish to eat, farmers have

to maintain—and I emphasise the word "maintain"—their agricultural areas. That is what they are doing, but it has been interpreted, either deliberately or through blissful ignorance, as land clearing. It is not land clearing; it is regrowth control. Regrowth is a phenomenon that is most prolific in Queensland. If it were not controlled, the farmers, the Greens and the rest of us would simply starve.

Farmers and timber industry workers are conservationists. How else could the condition of the forest on Fraser Island warrant World Heritage listing after 100 years of continuous, sustainable logging?

Mr Feldman: They built the whole of the London wharves out of Fraser Island timber.

Dr PRENZLER: They certainly did build the whole of the London wharves out of the turpentine timber that they extracted from Fraser Island. If one looked at that forest now, one would not even know that it had been logged.

Mr Feldman: They are going to lose the heritage rights out there because they are not doing anything with the land.

Dr PRENZLER: I thank the member for his interjection. Something is happening on Fraser Island that will happen everywhere else where vast tracts of land are locked up and deprived of the sensible and responsible stewardship of the forest industry workers. Access tracks and fire breaks are growing over. The risk is rapidly increasing of a forest fire that will have more devastating results than the tree huggers could ever imagine. Noxious weeds are proliferating. On the mainland, one can add feral animals, feral people and drug plantations to the litany of potential disastrous impacts. I point to what happened a couple of years ago in the Blue Mountains because the area had been locked up and nothing was cleaned out. No fires were put through to clear out the rubbish in the undergrowth. The fire swept through, burning everything and killing even the large mature trees.

Is it not obvious that the majority of timber workers are going to ensure that the industry is sustainable, because they want job security and they want their communities to continue to thrive. They want to continue to feed their families. Nobody wants those people to be forced to move to the cities to find work. Nobody wants them to have to rely on the dole to feed their families. In Australia, over one-third of total Government outlays is now consumed by welfare. We must not add those people to the list. They do not want to be there and they have done nothing to deserve to be there.

Where does it all end? How many so-called efficient and green practices do we have to have? How many agreements, negotiations, regulations, guidelines and restrictions and how much red tape will be inflicted on these people? They just want to be left alone to do what it is that they do and have done quite successfully for many years, which is to harvest sustainable timber from the forests. Why do Governments always take things too far? I can answer that very easily. Governments always take things too far because they spend more time listening to the vote counters than they do to the people who will be most affected by some of their decisions. The Bill before us is a part of this highly damaging process.

The Bill also highlights the difference between what the Beattie Labor Government said it was going to do and what it is actually going to do. The Minister said that the 25-year agreements will provide long-term resource security to the forests and the timber industry. The Minister said that the agreements will promote economic and social stability in the industry, ensure job security and promote economic development in rural and regional communities. Why is it that the people in those communities do not feel secure? More to the point, why is it that the Bill does not stipulate that the sales agreements are actually for 25 years? Clause 4(3)(a) of the Bill states, "be granted for a period of not more than 25 years". It does not state, "for a stable, secure, definite period of 25 years". This is at odds with what the Minister stated quite clearly in his speech and what the agreement states quite clearly in clause 2(14).

Clause 4(3)(b) allows that a sales permit may "provide for compensation payable to the permittee in stated circumstances". I would like to know what those stated circumstances are. Is this designed simply to enable the cancellation of somebody's permit? Under what circumstances can the permits be cancelled or taken away from people?

Clause 4(3)(c) demands that anybody who is awarded a sales permit must, by legislation, be required to give the State the first right of refusal to an assignment or transfer of that permit. I ask the Minister: why does the Government want this clause included in the legislation? Is it because it wishes to further undermine the viability of the industry by buying back any allocations that come onto the market and then locking them up?

I have great concerns about generational transfer, which is an issue that the member for Caboolture has just raised. One can no longer pass family businesses on to one's children. The Federal Government has a lot of laws to stop that. I cannot understand why that should be so. I would like the Minister to comment on the transgenerational transfer of family businesses such as mills. Will the

legislation interfere with the legitimate business of amalgamating two or more struggling allocations to make a viable business unit?

As I have just stated, I have a lot of concerns with the clause that grants the State the first right of refusal to an assignment or transfer of a permit. Does the Government aim to control all permits one day? What else is the Government hoping to achieve by the inclusion of this clause in the legislation? When the Government exercises its right to take up an assignment in the event that a miller wishes to sell, the Government will obviously remove that assignment from the system. I am sure that that is what is intended by this clause. The mill owner is provided for, but has the Government given any thought to the mill workers, the follow-on workers and the communities that will be impacted by the loss of even more mills from the system?

I also have trouble with the fact that the Government keeps claiming that it went through a very in-depth consultative process in relation to the agreements. In view of that claim, I wonder why it is that 21 mayors have said that they have not been consulted at all? The other day, a meeting of 16 councils drew up an eight-point plan asking the Government to consult with them. Obviously, it does not want to do that.

In the interests of the timber workers, their families and communities and the economy of Queensland, I am afraid that we are unable to support any legislation that facilitates the progression of these forestry agreements. The agreements provide few positives for the timber industry in the State and pose too many threats to the Queensland timber communities.
