



Speech by

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE**

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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Hansard 3 December 1999

### **FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL**

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE** (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.20 p.m.): In supporting the comments made by my colleagues on this side of the House, I think we saw a continuation of the Government's political dishonesty in this place this morning when the Minister for State Development, the Deputy Premier, the man who has presided over little else in this State except a 60% increase in his own budget, attempted to say that all the mayors supported this. Obviously, he decided to ignore the resolution of the Local Government Association's annual conference. Obviously, he decided to ignore the meeting of 21 mayors in Maryborough a couple of weeks ago. Obviously, he was not aware of the depth of feeling when 16 councils and many mayors met with the Opposition in Gympie last Monday. The fact is that the awareness is growing. They have been sold a pup. They have been deceived. They have been tricked. And now they are very angry.

This Bill represents the first legislative plank in one of the greatest furphies the people of Queensland have ever witnessed—the first legislative plank in what will go down in the history books as one of the greatest betrayals of rural and regional communities, of workers and of an industry that the State of Queensland has ever seen; and, in terms of the performance of the Deputy Premier, one of the greatest sell-outs of the interests of the Australian Workers Union by an AWU faction leader in a Labor Government.

This Bill uses the Parliament to try to give a modicum of credibility to another of the Beattie Government's PR stunts. We are being asked to support a Bill designed to give legislative support to a backroom deal between a couple of Green groups and the Beattie Labor Government in exchange for Green preferences at the last election—a shabby deal that traded the future of a viable and valuable industry, the jobs of 1,200 timberworkers and thousands of others who depend on the industry and the future of dozens of rural and regional communities for a handful of Green preferences in marginal urban electorates.

The deal that this Bill represents is an insult to the Regional Forest Agreement process—the process that arose out of the National Forest Policy Statement, ironically introduced by a Labor Government, and a process that enjoyed bipartisan support; a process that was supported by all sides of politics and all in the industry, including both the former Keating and Goss Governments; a process designed to take the politics out of the timber industry and let it get on with the job of generating income and jobs; a process that was designed to base forest decisions on science rather than election campaigns; but a process that has been used by the Labor Party to further its own political agenda in a whatever-it-takes grab for power.

This Bill has been purported by the Minister to provide the timber industry with the long-term security it needs to invest and to create jobs. It purports to provide 25-year wood supply agreements to those millers, and a provision for compensation for any breach of those agreements. But while the State Labor Government is proclaiming its supposed intention to provide long-term security, the very same Labor Party is doing its level best to undermine that security in another bid to score political points and Green preferences.

Last week, we saw another classic example of the cynical levels to which Labor will stoop to compromise the very people it purports to represent and the very policy platform it purports to stand on. Despite signing off on the National Forest Policy Statement, the Labor Party reneged on that

commitment and sought to provide the Senate with the power to review and reject Regional Forest Agreements signed by the States and the Commonwealth with the support of Queensland Labor Party senators. In doing so, it effectively bombed any chance of providing genuine legislative teeth to provide the timber industry security through RFAs, including that for south-east Queensland.

Labor sold out the timber millers, the communities that depend on those mills and the workers. My colleague the member for Crows Nest has already quoted the widespread condemnation of Labor's cheap politicking by the National Association of Forest Industries, the Forest Protection Society and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union.

But where was the Beattie Government while all this was happening? Where was the Premier—the same Premier who is so quick to blame his own multitude of failings on the Federal Government? He was nowhere to be found; missing in action; performing some other diversionary stunt to hide the fact that his can't do Government was once again failing to deliver on the part of Queensland and failing to even get his Federal Labor Party senators to protect the integrity of the RFA process which, in Government, they supported.

Why was the Premier not supporting legislation that would give the same security to the industry and to communities as he claims to want to provide through this Bill to south-east Queensland? Why did the Premier not heed my calls, made over a month ago, when his Labor mates in Canberra supported those amendments the first time around? There are only two possible reasons. Was it that he could not stand up to them? Or was it that he did not want to? The silence from the normally not silent Premier was deafening. It remains deafening on this issue to this very day.

Labor is not interested in tackling the issue. The Beattie Government has no interest in delivering a future for the timber industry and timberworkers. All the Beattie Government is interested in is a quick political fix to appease its Green allies and take the problem off the front page of the Courier-Mail.

This Bill does not represent a Regional Forest Agreement. It represents what was termed a heads of agreement, signed by the Beattie Government, a representative of the Wilderness Society, a representative of the Australian Rainforest Society, her husband— as a representative of the Queensland Conservation Council, and a representative of the Queensland Timber Board. Most of the stakeholders were locked out. The local authorities were shut out. The timberworkers, the contractors, the service industries and the communities affected were shut out. The Queensland taxpayers, who own the resource and who are expected to pay for this deal, did not get an invitation to the closed little Labor Party, either. That heads of agreement signed away the future of the Crown native hardwood industry on little more than a few sweeping commitments from the Premier. There was no detail, and there remains precious little detail.

The Minister stated in his second-reading speech—and we have heard it many times in this House—that the Beattie Government is committed to moving out of logging the Crown native forests and into a plantation-based industry. Yet while this Bill paves the way for the Government to undertake part of that commitment and move out of logging the Crown native forest, we have not seen the same commitment to boosting the plantation resource. There has been plenty of rhetoric, but I still look forward to the grand announcement that the Beattie Government has planted its first tree under this deal—or perhaps the announcement that it will introduce right-to-harvest legislation and will not restrict the right of freehold landowners to harvest timber on their own properties. There remains no detail on how the remaining area of Crown forest, after 425,000 hectares have been set aside as reserve, will sustain the intensive logging necessary to maintain existing wood supply agreements—those agreements this Bill purports to protect.

While one of the principles of the Premier's heads of agreement was that there would be no clear-felling, the inevitable result of the reduction in minimum girth size of millable logs to only 40 centimetres diameter and the pressure on that remaining resource leaves little other description. How will this be sustainable without enhanced silviculture, without replanting programs? There has been no commitment to continued compensation for additional log haulage costs and no commitment to structural adjustment. Nor has there been any detail on how those mills that will be forced to seek wood supplies from other areas or utilise different species will continue to afford to do so in the absence of any such assistance.

The gloss of the big announcement of 16 September has worn off and the communities, the workers, the contractors, the service industries and the shire councils are not happy. They have seen through the spin, they have seen through the stunts and they have seen through the PR. They want answers and they are not getting them. They want the details on how this legislation is going to safeguard the jobs for the hundreds of years that the Premier claimed in his media release. In the same media release, he gave the commitment that any timberworker who wants a job in the timber industry will have a job in the timber industry. Where are the jobs for the 80 timberworkers at the Nandroya mill, who are to lose their jobs in October next year? Where are the jobs for the contractors

and their staff, such as the 11 workers who used to work for timber contractor, Peter Carter, and had to be laid off because of the Beattie Government's deal?

In that same media release, the Premier proclaimed the deal as—

"Another triumph for my style of consultative Government."

What a triumph it is turning out to be! It is the Technomart of the trees. It is another con job. It is another failed effort by this failed Premier and his failed Government. There is no guarantee that the Federal Government will support it and there will be no Federal legislation to support it should they do so. Already, hundreds of jobs have gone. There has been not one new job created and not one tree planted. There has been no consultation with the stakeholders in the forest industries. Yet the Premier says that it is a triumph!

Those stakeholders—the workers, the contractors, service industries, and shire councils—can see this happening first-hand in their own communities. Just last week, 21 shires, including conservative mayors, Labor mayors and Independents, met and carried unanimously a resolution highlighting the failings of this deal. At another meeting on Monday, 16 shires from within the RFA area again endorsed those sentiments. They are concerned, and rightly so. They do not trust this Beattie Labor Government, which is long on rhetoric and short on action, and nor should they.

This is a mischievous piece of legislation. Although on the one hand the Beattie Government has proclaimed its supposed commitment to 25-year wood supply agreements, at the very core of this Bill are provisions to undermine that security by allowing the Government the first right of refusal to buy out viable businesses at fair market value within that period. What will happen to the jobs that those businesses provide? What will happen to the services, such as the schools, the shops, the churches and the hospitals that they support? What will happen to the industries those jobs support? What will happen to the shires that depend on the rates that all of those people pay to provide services to the community? How exactly will fair market value be determined when no-one in their right minds would bother wasting their time and money investigating the purchase of a business or a wood supply agreement knowing that the Government will inevitably acquire it, anyway?

**Mr Seeney:** And then shut it down.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** As my colleague says, and then shut it down. Such a provision can only jaundice the market, denying hardworking sawmillers, with potentially millions of dollars invested, a return on the true value of their investment.

Further undermining this Bill is the intention of the Beattie Government to introduce mandatory controls on the clearing of timber on freehold land and its mishandling of the entire issue. It is denying land-holders the right to manage their land as they see fit—to practice silviculture and generate alternative income. It is also denying them the viability of their properties. However, it is also denying the sawmills another source of wood supply, because many depend on timber from private land-holders for up to 60% of that supply. So although the Beattie Government claims to be giving with this Bill, with the other hand it is taking away.

In his second-reading speech, the Minister said that he expected wholehearted support for this Bill. How can this Parliament be reasonably expected to hand the Minister wholehearted support when there are so many gaping holes in his Government's administration of the timber industry and private land in this State? How can this Parliament be reasonably expected to hand the Minister wholehearted support when already we are witnessing job losses and the destruction of otherwise viable businesses throughout south-east Queensland because of his deal?

On the two issues of the regional forest agreement and tree-clearing controls alone, the Beattie Government has shown just how out of touch it is with rural and regional Queensland. The message is reverberating around the Local Government Association, the councils, the work force, the unions, the communities and the bush: the Beattie Government has not delivered, cannot deliver and will not deliver. There is no substance to this Bill. It is just another stunt of a stunt-ridden Premier.

**Mr Seeney:** Another con job.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** As the member for Callide says, it is another con job. This Bill is policy on the run from a can't do Government.

I wish to bring to the attention of the House information that I have received from the Institute of Foresters of Australia— Queensland Division. The Institute of Foresters comprises many people with enormous expertise in this field. It includes a large number of bureaucrats—experienced public servants from the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Natural Resources. I refer to what they have to say about this Bill—

"Not being included in the negotiations, the Division has not yet had time to fully consider the proposals."

So the Institute of Foresters was locked out. The bureaucrats from DPI and DNR, who could have made a contribution, were not involved. The institute states that they have the following concerns—

"The lack of professional input into final negotiations. The Departments of Primary Industries—DPI Forestry and Natural Resources—DNR Resource Management and the Parks & Wildlife Service as well as the Institute were excluded. The Department of State Development had carriage of negotiations over the last 4-6 months."

What a disgrace! What a mockery of the consultation process! The institute states the further concerns—

"The timeframe for hardwood plantations to produce sawlogs—25 years—in sufficient volumes to replace existing supplies from native forests.

The availability of land—both Crown & private—for the plantations. Little or no cleared Crown land is available in SE Qld.

Arrangements for those workers who lose their jobs."

These are not the comments of the Opposition, which the Minister is so quick to condemn and these are not the comments of inexperienced people. I am referring to the Institute of Foresters of Australia—Queensland Division, the membership of which is made up in large part by those bureaucrats in the Public Service who have experience and knowledge of forestry issues. They were locked out of the process by the Deputy Premier just as, I am sure, the Minister for Primary Industries was locked out of the process by the Deputy Premier. In respect of so many issues, the Deputy Premier treats him with absolute contempt.

The evidence is mounting that this is not an RFA; this is a cosy little backroom deal, where one of the people who signed the backroom deal could even bring their husband along to be part of the process. Yet we find the Institute of Foresters locked out, we find the local councils locked out, we find the local mayors locked out and we find the workers locked out. As each day goes by, this Government is being found out. People are realising what a shonky exercise this has been from day one—from the day Premier Beattie and the Labor Party traded in an industry for green preferences prior to the last election in terms of the formulation of policy.

The Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Minister might think that the PR exercise might have worked. I am telling the Minister that it is coming unstuck at an absolutely amazing rate of knots. People do not like it when they are deceived. People do not like it when they have been lied to. People do not like it when their livelihoods have been eroded on the back of some backroom deal. People do not like it when a viable industry is being sacrificed at the altar of political expediency. People do not like it when an absolutely gutless Premier tries to blame everyone else.

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