



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 25 May 1999

REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (6.06 p.m.): I am pleased to second this motion. There can be only one valid outcome to the regional forest agreement, and that is for the data to be used to ensure a viable timber industry in concert with enhanced protection for forests. They were the parameters set by the National Forest Policy Statement of 1992. It is only some members opposite and some of their supporters outside this place who believe that those outcomes are mutually exclusive and who believe that what the RFA presents is an opportunity to kill over 1,100 direct jobs and cripple or kill 35 Queensland communities.

The wealth of data that has been accumulated in this process establishes that, with improved productivity in mills, with the application of silviculture to the management of our forests, and with the establishment of hardwood plantations, we can have an industry that actually grows jobs while substantially expanding the comprehensive and representative reserve system. We will not meet the Keating target of 15% preservation of pre-1750 forests, but that was explicit—totally explicit—in the 1997 scoping agreement I signed with John Howard after the former Labor Government failed to get a similar undertaking from Paul Keating before it shut up shop in 1995 and went into hibernation.

We can have a win-win outcome to this RFA. Commonwealth Forestry Minister, Wilson Tuckey, believes that outcome is appropriate, and he has demonstrated via the Western Australian RFA that it is achievable. In that jurisdiction, the recently completed RFA engages significant additions to areas of reserve forests with a net gain in jobs and long-term security for the industry.

I would emphasise my total concurrence, however, with the warnings contained in the movement of the motion by my colleague the honourable member for Keppel. There is a very grave concern that what we see unfolding now in the Government's attitude is a deal with the Greens—hatched before the last State election in return for Green preferences in a number of seats. What we are seeing now, through this Government's administration of the RFA process, is the pay-off—the pay-off for being on the Treasury benches. I just make this observation: if a coalition Government was altering policy that could cause loss of employment for 1,100 people and could potentially destroy 35 communities, the Criminal Justice Commission would be falling over itself to have a commission of inquiry.

The Government's administration of this scheme smells. We know that Environment Minister Welford had written into the options paper options to close down the industry. We know that the Federal Government is saying that it is confident of an outcome where not one job is lost. What is standing in the way? What is standing in the way is the deal that those opposite did with the Greens at the time of the last State election.

Is it not ironic that we are about to see the AWU potentially sold out again by the AWU faction leader in Cabinet? Just as he rolled over and sold the AWU out in respect of industrial relations, we are now seeing the Deputy Premier of this State, the Minister for State Development, confirming his position as little more than the political version of a vacant lot sitting in the Cabinet room.

There is no justification at all for any job losses under this process. All we need is the Government to have the will and, of course, freedom and the flexibility so that it is not tied to the assurances that it gave to the environmentalists and the Greens at the last State election—people such

as Charles Hamilton at the Gold Coast who remind the Government by email of the agreement. They say, "Honour the deal. Honour the agreement."

We know the price. We know how horrendous that price will be. The motion moved by the honourable member for Keppel tonight is sensible. It is commonsense. It should be embraced by each and every member of this House who has a true commitment to jobs and believes in a sustainable industry in this State.

Time expired.