



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 27 October 1999

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (6.01 p.m.): I move—

"That this House condemns the Beattie Government for the loss of timber workers' and contractors' jobs in such communities as the Sunshine Coast Hinterland, Dingo and Eidsvold under its South-east Queensland Regional Forest deal, and for its failure to provide genuine alternative jobs in those regions.

Further, that if job losses are to occur under the Beattie Government's South-east Queensland Regional Forest deal, this House calls on the Beattie Government to provide a worthwhile redundancy package to all those timber workers and contractors who will lose their business or their job."

The deal announced on 16 November regarding the future of south-east Queensland's Crown native hardwood forest is shaping up as another Beattie PR con job and another great deceit against the timber industry in this State and the dozens of communities that depend on that industry for their livelihood. On 16 September, the Premier, the Queensland Timber Board, the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, the Queensland Conservation Council and the Wilderness Society signed a deal to shut down the Crown native hardwood forest by 2024. In doing so, the big three timber companies were to be paid out, another 425,000 hectares was to be added to reserves, and some 10,000 hectares of plantation was supposedly to be established to replace that wood supply. Three green groups, one industry group and the current Labor Government signed the deal. The contractors were not privy to it. The communities were not privy to it. The Forest Protection Society was not privy to it. The Queensland public, who own the resource, were not privy to it. This was a deal done behind closed doors with a gun held to the Queensland Timber Board's head. While we have heard the rhetoric over and over, we have not seen the detail.

Let us look at the plan. Part 2.2 of the deal says that the Queensland Government will immediately implement a strategy to develop substantial hardwood plantations to enable the industry to transition to a plantation-based resource by 2025, or sooner where practicable. \$18m is apparently to be spent planting 10,000 hectares over five years—only one-tenth of the planting rate being achieved by the private sector in Western Australia alone. Where was the budget allocation? Where exactly are these plantations to be located? What science supports the ability of those 10,000 hectares to replace 425,000 hectares?

Part 2.3 says that incentives will be available to facilitate industry transition over the 25-year period into value added hardwood products, hardwood plantation timbers and private native hardwood resource, including farm forestry. Where are the incentives? Where is the right-to-harvest legislation? What implications will the Government's tree-clearing guidelines on freehold land have on the security of timber supply from private land? What legal security has been provided to individual sawmills for their contracts? Will those contracts be offered on a take-it-or-leave-it basis? Will they be subject to review?

Part 2.4 says that there will be an immediate addition to the conservation reserve system of 425,000 hectares by 31 December 1999, if possible. Where are the plantations to be located? Where is the budget provision to manage this new reserve? Will grazing leases in those areas be renewed?

Part 2.13 refers to providing timber supply at current volumes for the 25-year period that logging will continue from the remaining 100,000-odd hectares of State forest, after 425,000 hectares have

been set aside as reserve. But Part 2.7 says that there will be no harvesting of non-sawlog material and residues other than for products currently produced. How will sawmills avoid over-cutting the remains of the non-reserve resource? What will happen if that timber is not allowed to be used? Will it simply be dozed up and burnt?

I could go on and on, but there is no detail to support the Government's deal. This is policy on the run. And the pathetic display by the Deputy Premier in question time this morning only confirmed the absolute lack of substance in this forest deal. This deal is about the Beattie Labor Government's pre-election promise to the Greens to shut down the hardwood industry. The Premier and his deputy say that this will generate jobs. We have heard the grand total of 471 jobs mentioned over and over, but we have not seen one yet. What we have seen have been the job losses—the Peter Carters of the timber industry; a private sawmill operator who has spent \$250,000 upgrading his sawmill over the past four years and employing a dozen workers; the very same sawmill operator who was forced to sack 11 of his workers after his forest tender was not renewed because it had been reallocated to the larger mills which will lose their timber allocations under this deal. Mr Carter has now been forced to source his timber supplies—to keep what is left of his business going—from New South Wales.

What about the independent timber cutters like Mr Kluska of North Arm who, despite having a Government permit to cut fenceposts until April next year, as a result of this job-destroying deal, has now been told to cease his activities by December 1999—just eight weeks away? The cracks are starting to appear. The shiny veneer of 16 September is starting to crack and peel away to reveal what a shonky con job this forest deal really is—a deal that the coalition does not support. We do not support a deal which sacrifices the jobs of hardworking timberworkers and contractors for a handful of green preferences at election time. This motion highlights this. But this motion also calls for those workers who have paid for Mr Beattie's preferences with their livelihoods to be compensated with an appropriate redundancy package. The contractors and the workers have heard the talk. They have seen the taxpayer-funded television commercials telling them how well off they are. Now they want action. Now they want detail. Now they want to see the colour of Mr Beattie's money.

Labor purports to represent the workers, but the workers who are to pay the price for Labor's deal have been forgotten. Eighty jobs are to go at Cooroy. Dozens of contractors and their workers will go, and are going already—members of the Australian Workers Union. We have heard the Premier say that they can go to Maryborough. What guarantees have those workers at Nandroya been given that they will get a job at Maryborough, even if they are prepared to do the four-hour round trip? And will they have assistance to relocate their families? What assistance is the Government providing to help them with their relocation? This motion recognises that those workers are the unwitting victims of the Beattie Government's deal to close down the timber industry. It recognises that taking away a person's livelihood—a family's income and its way of life—deserves, at the very least, some form of compensation to help them find another job or relocate to another area.

It recognises that renting a vacant shop in Cooroy simply to take people's details and refer them to Centrelink is not good enough. That is the contribution of the traitor to the AWU who sits opposite; the man who has betrayed the AWU; the man who this morning in this place could not answer the most basic questions about this shabby, shonky deal over which he has presided. He is the man who could not give any guarantees in respect of where the jobs will be; the man who could not give any guarantees in respect of those decent Queensland families who are already suffering as a result of this particular deal. He sets up a shopfront where forms are handed out to refer people to Centrelink. When people complain about it, what does he do? What does the head of the AWU faction in the Beattie Labor Government do? He says they can go to Maryborough. Bad luck if their homes are in Cooroy! Bad luck if their kids go to school there! Bad luck if their families are in Cooroy! They can drive for four hours each day to go and get one of these jobs that the Deputy Premier has not even been able to guarantee will go to them in the first instance.

This is typical of this deceitful Government; this Government lacking in honesty; this Government lacking in principle. This is a Government that will do anything to be part of a cheap PR stunt. What we are seeing is this shabby, shonky RFA deal already starting to unravel. The responsible Minister in this place is unable to provide any of the details whatsoever when asked to do so by the Parliament.

Time expired.
