



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 13 April 1999

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Evertton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (6.13 p.m.): I move the following amendment to the motion—

"Remove everything after the word 'Parliament' and replace it with—

'acknowledges the continuing efforts of this Government to successfully conclude a Regional Forestry Agreement for South East Queensland that provides for the maintenance and creation of sustainable long term jobs in timber and timber product industries and protection for areas of high conservation value.

Further that this Parliament urges the Commonwealth Government to work in good faith with the Queensland Government to provide the best possible Regional Forest Agreement outcome for all Queenslanders.'

It is seven years since the National Forest Policy Statement was agreed upon by the States and the Commonwealth, giving rise to the regional forest agreement, or the RFA process. The RFA process is about sustainability and certainty—making sure that we can sustain our native forests and providing certainty for the communities that depend upon them.

In 1995 the Goss Government had two historic initiatives in train: firstly, a policy to create new plantation resources to provide the timber industry with a long-term, viable and sustainable future; and secondly, a process for achieving greater planning certainty to address environmental and resource issues in native forests across the State. When the coalition took office in 1996, it had an opportunity to progress the RFA—to address key issues such as sustainable yields and, therefore, to address the security of jobs for the timber industry. The coalition was well aware that the timber industry was operating at significantly unsustainable levels. However, despite having access to critical data, it did nothing.

I refer to a report commissioned jointly by the Borbidge and Howard Governments in 1997 under the RFA process, which deals with the "Public Resource Description and Inventory" for south-east Queensland. This report provided the baseline scenario for sustainable yields and confirms that, in 1997, when the Borbidge Government was in office, a standard five-yearly review of sustainable timber allocations from State forests was due. The last review was in 1992. This review was carried out by DPI Forestry under the previous National Party Minister. The data was produced and given to the Department of Natural Resources, again under the previous National Party Minister. The departmental records show that this data was first requested in January 1997, out of the then current allocation review process, and that updates were promised in November 1997 and received a month later on 8 December 1997. This is over six months prior to the Beattie Government taking office.

How was this data produced? Using systems endorsed by the Opposition, the then coalition Minister for Primary Industries, Trevor Perrett, had this to say to this House about those systems as long ago as 2 October 1996—

"The DPI Forestry data collection and yield calculation system has been externally audited, and is open to external scrutiny, for example, by the Department of Natural Resources. Documented operational procedures are based on sound research carried out over many years."

What did this data show? It showed that, under the current management arrangements, under normal operating conditions, some areas would reach the end of commercial operations as early as 2007 and would need reductions of up to and over 40% to be sustainable in the long term. This is State forests we are talking about. Unfortunately, we have a history of overestimating the resource that we might have, and it has come down from as high as 189,000 cubic metres in 1976 to 108,000 cubic metres now. This data—data given to the coalition Government in December 1997—said that it would need to come down around 80,000 cubic metres. That was in December 1997. That reinforces the point that I made in the Parliament this morning—that the data on which this Government reached the figures in the report tabled by the honourable member was the same data as that honourable member had in December 1997.

I refer to a discussion paper on the issue, again widely circulated by the coalition Government. It states—

"If current silvicultural and marketing practices were to continue, the medium term sawlog availability from the group of 13 SEQ Allocation Zones would be approximately 80,000 cubic metres per annum."

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr WELFORD: That is a report that the former Minister, the member interjecting, had in 1997. It puts the lie to the absurd and dishonest allegations which he made today, and which he made in press releases issued today.

Mr HOBBS: I rise to a point of order. I find those words offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: The member has asked for those words to be withdrawn.

Mr WELFORD: I withdraw.
