



Speech by

**Hon. R. WELFORD**

**MEMBER FOR EVERTON**

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Hansard 27 May 1999

### **REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT**

**Hon. R. J. WELFORD** (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (6.20 p.m.): I second the amendment moved by the Deputy Premier. In doing so, I join the Deputy Premier in calling on members of the Opposition and One Nation to support our amendment for this reason: ultimately what happens in relation to the forests is about what investment we make in the future. As I said in the debate the other night on this very same issue, the reality is that to do nothing means that further employment will be lost and the industry will continue to decline as it has over the past 20 years. The simple reality is that the levels of harvest that have been established historically cannot be sustained. We will continue to lose jobs unless we invest in new resources into the future. The simple reality is that the national forest policy statement is not dictated by any world Government or secret society but is a position agreed to by all State and Federal Governments of all political colours.

**Mr Feldman** interjected.

**Mr WELFORD:** If the honourable member listens, instead of confirming his ignorance, he might learn something.

The purpose of the National Forest Policy Statement was to get away from that conventional, tired old argument of jobs versus the environment or the timber industry versus the greenies. It was to chart a path for the future of Australia's natural resource management in a way that would provide some certainty about what areas, and according to what values, ought to be protected in reserves and what residual areas would be available for the continued security of timber resources for the timber industry. That future certainty is what the National Forest Policy Statement is all about. If members opposite want to bowl it over, they should go ahead. If they think that the RFA process and the National Forest Policy Statement should be thrown out the door, they should go out there and say that to those timber industries that are looking for some resource security. If they throw out the National Forest Policy Statement and the RFA, which is what they are advocating—they do not want an RFA according to the principles of that national statement—what they are doing is condemning those resource industries to an uncertain future.

The only way we are going to bring about certainty is to make the hard decisions that Governments have to make to provide that certainty in the future. That is why the Deputy Premier and the Department of State Development are involved in this process. Similar departments in other States were not involved. Our State is the only State which has made a conscientious effort to look at the way in which the Government can kick-start regional development in these areas to ensure that jobs are protected in the long term. We are the only State making that genuine commitment. The Federal Government is not making that commitment. Members opposite are too weak and lily-livered to stand up for Queensland and get the Federal Government to back us to achieve a decent outcome in this process. They are not genuine about this exercise. They are simply playing cheap, cynical politics, abrogating their responsibility as community leaders and blaming the Government. That is easy for members opposite. They are hiding around the back of the tent, trying not to take responsibility and blaming the Government for everything that is happening, yet they do not have a single idea about how we can develop a solution that will last into the future.

We do face a difficult problem. I will give honourable members an indication of its scale. The member for Caboolture's earlier comment that we are failing to consult is absolute nonsense. I have just walked in from a meeting with the Forest Protection Society. I have met with Mr Bill Ludwig from the Australian Workers Union and I have met with local governments throughout the south-east Queensland region and canvassed these issues with every one of them. The Deputy Premier and I have met with the Timber Board and the Forest Protection Society.

**Mr Palaszczuk:** So have I.

**Mr WELFORD:** The Minister for Primary Industries has also met with the Timber Board and the Forest Protection Society. It is absolutely stupid for members opposite to assert ignorantly that our Government is not consulting. They do not deserve the attention they receive.

This is a difficult issue. The National Forest Policy Statement and the RFA process, as laid down in the draft legislation of the Commonwealth, requires that a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system protecting ecosystems and threatened species needs to be established. We need to accept that that is a reality and get on with finding a solution that will protect jobs.

Time expired.

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