



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (6.21 p.m.): It is a pleasure to participate in this debate because once again it gives me a chance to outline the clear distinction between the role of the Government and the role of the Opposition in this issue. The Government is playing the most constructive possible role that any Government can play. The Opposition is being typically cynical about the tactics that it is using to try to divide the community and is playing conflict politics instead of the politics of consensus. This Government is about bringing Queenslanders together to find a solution that will build jobs for regional communities and achieve a conservation outcome that future generations of Queenslanders can be proud of. That is not the cynical political approach that the Opposition has been taking.

A couple of things raised by my shadow colleague Mr Lester make a bit of sense. Unlike some of his other colleagues, he contemplated the concept of a transition to a timber industry that is ultimately primarily based on plantations outside State forests. That transition is already occurring in the market today because 60% of the hardwood timber resource in south-east Queensland is already provided from private resources outside State forests. He also mentioned the need for a comprehensive and adequate reserve system.

At page 62, the directions report states that the comprehensive assessment of the region's forests shows that 620,000 hectares of State forest would need to be reserved from logging for south-east Queensland's reserve system to meet the national JANIS reserve criteria to the maximum extent possible on public land. That is the criteria that the RFA process applies to assessing how one defines the conservation reserve and then how one moves to identify the sustainable resource available for future timber harvesting. At page 63, the directions report pointed out that even then, because of the depleted state of the forests in the south-east Queensland region, only 55% of regional ecosystems would meet those national JANIS targets. Therefore, even on the higher scenario contemplated in the directions report—a scenario that we do not necessarily see that we have to deliver because of its economic and social impacts—which one would need to meet if one wanted to fulfil the proper requirements of the RFA process, 45% of forest types would not be represented in the reserve system to the level that the national criteria suggest. Even under that scenario, only one third—6 out of 18—of forest ecosystems listed as rare meet the target level of reservation and less than one sixth—4 out of 26—of forest ecosystems rated as vulnerable meet their target.

That gives members of the Parliament and the Queensland community an indication of the difficulty that we have in addressing the RFA issue in Queensland because our forests are already so limited. That is why we have a very real challenge in finding a solution that can deliver a reasonable conservation outcome that many Queenslanders would like to see as well as an outcome that can provide long-term job security for the people who are already involved in the timber industry.

Opposition members have said that this is about appeasing the Greens. I point to the broader view of the south-east Queensland community on how we manage these valuable forest resources on public lands, remembering that timber resources are already 60% provided from private lands. An assessment of the social and forest values of the community was undertaken by the Social Assessment Unit of the Department of Primary Industries and Energy in Canberra in conjunction with the Comprehensive Reserve Assessment Unit of my Department of Natural Resources. The

assessment found that in relation to forest management and use, the majority of the population in the south-east Queensland RFA region believe that recreation, 84%; tourism, 65%; and—believe it or not—beekeeping, 57%, should be allowed in State native forests in Queensland. Conversely, it found that grazing, 17%; logging, 17%; and mining, 8%, should not be allowed. Only in the Builyan sector does a majority of the population support logging, 67%, and grazing, 66%. We are dealing with the south-east Queensland community which recognises values other than logging as being very important.

Time expired.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr D'Arcy): Order! Does the member second the amendment moved by the Deputy Premier?

Mr WELFORD: Yes, I second the amendment.
