



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (6.09 p.m.): I second the motion and commend it to the House. In fact, I cannot see why all members of the House should not support it. The south-east Queensland timber industry has been wracked with uncertainty since the Beattie Government took office. The South East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement, which was intended to provide secure timber supplies, a comprehensive forest reserve system and better managed forests has been caught in a bitter factional war between Labor's Socialist Left and the Australian Workers Union. At stake is the future of our \$74m timber industry, the jobs of 1,036 timberworkers and the future of dozens of timber towns throughout south-east Queensland.

This Beattie Government, through its bungled faction-ridden administration of the RFA, has put the very jobs that it is supposedly so concerned about at grave risk. Despite being given an open opportunity this morning, both the Premier and his deputy have once again refused to guarantee the jobs of those timberworkers. This morning we even heard a clumsy attempt to blame the Federal Government. However, it is not Wilson Tuckey who is implementing the timber industry shutdown policy of this Government. Only late last month, the Primary Industries Minister gave a minimum 10-year allocation guarantee to the western Queensland cypress industry. In fact, on 23 March in the Courier-Mail he stated that the Queensland Government would not introduce policies which threatened the jobs of workers or the local ownership of sawmills. He went on to say that this Government is about giving security and certainty to the timber industry. By giving the 10-year guarantee, the Minister said that the cypress millers would be able to plan and invest with confidence.

Again, this morning the Premier refused to give that same assurance to the south-east Queensland timber industry where planning, investment and jobs are being put on hold. Why will this Government not give the same security and the same certainty that the Minister talked of to the Burnett Sawmill, the Wondai sawmill, the Monto sawmill or the sawmills at Toogoolawah, Esk or Crows Nest? The list goes on. The reason is that this Beattie Government has traded the jobs of the timber industry for a handful of Green preferences. I wonder whether "Mahatma" Pearce or the member for Bundaberg are going to protest along with their timberworkers against this policy.

In the nine months that this Government has held office, there has been a gradual assault on the future of the hardwood timber industry in this State. Not content with undermining the futures of the grazing industry, the irrigation industry, the fishing industry and the other farming industries, the Minister for Natural Resources has now turned his sights on the timber industry. Armed with Labor's biodiversity policy and with Dr Aila Keto pulling the strings, the Natural Resources Minister has set about to close down south-east Queensland's native timber industry. We then saw the Deputy Premier brought in to drive the RFA process—to show some desperately needed leadership in the absence of any from either the Natural Resources Minister or the Primary Industries Minister. However, in common with his two colleagues, he has proved unwilling and unable to bridge the factional divide and achieve a result.

All members should be absolutely clear that the Government's policy flies in the face of the agreed RFA objectives. The policy is devoid of any scientific justification and is simply the result of a sleazy backroom preference deal made prior to the last election. Despite the froth and bubble rhetoric, this Government has consistently refused to guarantee the security of timber supply—a key provision of the RFA process endorsed by both State and Federal Governments. Labor's approach calls for the transition out of native forest logging over varying times, from immediately to 20 years' time depending on the supply zone. However, the folly of this approach is that both now and under the previous Goss

Government there has been no commitment by Labor to develop any firm policies or commit any funding towards those putting trees in the ground as replacements. That means that Labor's transition policy is not a transition to plantation resources but a transition to closing down sawmills and mass unemployment.

Instead of following the Borbidge Government's lead and helping the industry to actually grow further, increase value adding and boost jobs, the Beattie Government's efforts have focused on mickey mouse employment schemes for those timberworkers that Labor's policy will see sacked. Queensland has the chance to lead the world in sustainable forest management. However, if the Natural Resources Minister and his Socialist Left faction have their way, the industry will be shut down and Queensland will be forced to import even more timber, and most likely from countries with dubious forest management. Will that meet the objectives of the Queensland Labor Government? With enhanced silviculture and a serious commitment, current native sawlog allocations can be maintained while still providing for a reserve system. I urge members to support this motion.
