



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (6.21 p.m.): I rise to support the motion, which represents another positive attempt by the coalition to restore some logic to the RFA debate. The Opposition is about logic and realism and will not be fooled. In the past, the people of the Maryborough area were fooled with the promise of jobs when the timber industry was closed on Fraser Island. I know that the Mayor of Maryborough, Alan Brown, has said that not one permanent job came out of all the promises that were made. The people of that area were hurt and the people of the Ravenshoe area were hurt when the timber industry in that area was closed. No jobs at all came out of that. So any pretence that jobs will come out of the options put forward by the Beattie Government will fall to the ground. People would be extremely foolish to be sucked in by those options.

The amendment to the motion moved by the Government refers to the development of a world-class timber industry incorporating a high level of value adding downstream processing. Those things should be happening, anyway. To my mind, those jobs will be created well downstream from the timber towns and the 500 jobs for the people in the timber towns will still go. That is what we do not want to see, and the Opposition will not have it. If 500 jobs were picked up in the processing area downstream and 500 jobs were lost in the timber towns, that is a negative result. We should be doing the lot, that is, harvesting the plantations of softwoods and hardwoods and value adding downstream through processing. That way, we will gain employment, not just strike even.

I do not believe that this Government is interested in improved forest management at all. I do not believe that it is interested in timber jobs or regional development. Despite all its rhetoric, when it comes to the crunch it is interested only in using the RFA for one purpose, and that is to shut down the native hardwood industry. That is why the Government insisted to Wilson Tuckey that its two extreme options of putting another 500,000 hectares and 620,000 hectares into reserve be included in the directions report. Those options would destroy the forest industry and the jobs that it provides.

The Government calls itself the jobs, jobs, jobs Government. Where are the options that safeguard the existing jobs and create new ones? Like the Minister for Primary Industries, the member for Inala, they are missing in action. The Federal Minister, Mr Tuckey, has referred to this Minister as the invisible man because of his failure to contribute anything to the RFA debate, and that is true. Like the rest of us, the Minister has a responsibility to stick up for timber towns and the timber industry and to be out there openly and publicly supporting them, not trying to do them down in terms of their jobs.

The Government's directions report is hopelessly flawed. Despite the terms of reference of the RFA, which provide for improved management of our native hardwood forests, not one of the seven options of that report addresses that issue. Better management of the forests will give better yields and better environmental outcomes. The continued expansion of plantations is also essential to the ongoing development of the native hardwood timber industry—a fact conceded by the Beattie Government.

However, while we have heard all the rhetoric, there has been no commitment by this Government to the expansion of hardwood plantations. Not one of the seven options addresses the establishment of additional hardwood plantations. Aside from those shortcomings, the directions report sends two other very disturbing signals about the Beattie Government's bush bashing policies. Forestry leases are an integral part of the grazing industry in south-east Queensland, where some 43,000 head

of cattle graze on either 412,000 hectares, if one reads the SE4.2 forest grazing report, or 510,000 hectares, if one reads the directions report.

The difference in those two figures that are contained in two Government reports on the same issue raises questions on its own. Nevertheless, cattle graze on some 45% of Crown forestry under either seven-year grazing permits or 30-year term leases. However, a fact that should send the alarm bells ringing in the grazing industry is that every single option canvassed in the directions report allows for the closure of vast areas of grazing leases. The areas range from Option A, under which 68,913 hectares could be locked up, to Option F, where 212,000 hectares could be locked up. To do so would not require a change of legislation.

The impact on the south-east Queensland grazing industry would be catastrophic. Another industry and yet more jobs are at risk. However, where does the Minister for Primary Industries stand on matters such as cattle grazing? Does he support cattle grazing on these forestry leases or does he support them disappearing as well?

Mr Palaszczuk: Ask me the question tomorrow.

Mr COOPER: No, I am asking the member now. The Minister does not want to answer it. As usual, he is ducking that question. The Minister will not go on record to support the cattle industry. As I have said, hundreds of thousands of hectares are used by the cattle industry.

Time expired.
