



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (6.26 p.m.): Of course, the Opposition will not be supporting the amendment even though it uses very fancy words. However, if we are going to arrive we have to know how we are going to get there. All members on this side of the House want to see a viable and sustainable timber industry, which is what we have been on about, as has the industry itself. For the past 125 to 150 years, the timber industry workers have proven themselves to be very good managers. People in this place and those families that have relied on the timber industry for a living for five or six generations are sick and tired of the Greens telling them where to get off. The Greens do not care about the livelihoods of those people. People like Aila Keto would sell their souls to destroy the livelihoods of the people who work in the timber industry. The Minister for Environment saw those workers today. He should have gone out and said hello, because they are honest to goodness, decent Queenslanders who are trying to make a living. It is a pity that they had to come all the way to Parliament House to fight for their livelihoods. Nevertheless, they certainly were extremely well behaved, and I place that on the record.

Simply as a bit of ironic trivia, I note that many people watching the proceedings of today saw members of the Green party in a boat, floating on the river. Can members guess what sort of a boat they were in? It was a wooden boat. It is funny that they needed wood to float on the water. That does not worry them; they think that that will continue.

I quote from Charles Hamilton, who sent an email report to ALP members which stated that he wanted a—

"... transition out of native forests for the timber industry and into plantations as required by Labor's biodiversity policy, a critical element in the conservation movement's support for Labor at the last election."

It was simply a deal that was done for some preferences and those people's jobs and livelihoods have been put up for grabs.

Government members interjected.

Mr COOPER: It is true and they know that. Members opposite do not have to listen to me; 3,500 people know the truth. They know that the Government, hand in glove with the Greens, wants to close the industry down and send those people to the wall. We know it and they know it, and it is a tragedy. The Government's directions report has put forward two extreme options to satisfy the extreme Greens, one to close 500,000 hectares and the other to close 620,000 hectares. Everyone knows that that will be the finish of the hardwood timber industry and native forests. We can all live side by side. The forests are sustainable. Plantations are right for the cypress softwood industry and the hardwood industries. The Opposition agrees with that proposition. We think plantations are certainly the way to go, along with the natural timber that is available in the native forests, which as I said have been beautifully managed for over 125 years.

Today we heard Maryborough Mayor Alan Brown, who is probably of the same political ilk as members opposite, condemning the Government for what it is trying to do to the industry. That condemnation was also reiterated by people from Fraser Island. Both those people and Alan Brown know only too well that the so-called compensation packages, which involved getting people without

fingers and thumbs to work as waiters and flower pickers, offer people nothing worth while. Those people know that a fraud was perpetrated on them. They will not be burnt again.

Similarly, the workers at Ravenshoe were made all of the promises under the sun. That industry was run beautifully and managed very well. It was the pride of Queensland. People from around the world looked to Ravenshoe as a model for managing a hardwood timber industry. But that was shut down, too. The Government's decision will close down the 44 timber towns right across the State. The Government should not be trying to get people to make compromises. There is no need to do that. The Government's awful deal with the Greens has put it in this situation. It should not let these people be the pawns in this dreadful game. There is no need for this process to be drawn out like this and no need to blame the Feds. Now that Labor is in Government, it is its responsibility to manage this RFA process. The Government can do this. It will gain a lot of goodwill from this side of the House if it looks after people in the timber industry.

A Government member interjected.

Mr COOPER: The honourable member said, "We are." We will see about that. Those people who protested today do not know that yet. They would not have come down here unless they felt they had to.

Time expired.
