



Speech by

**Mr TIM MULHERIN**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

---

Hansard 25 March 1999

**CYPRESS INDUSTRY, WESTERN QUEENSLAND**

**Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (6.28 p.m.): No doubt the people of Augathella were grateful to see the Primary Industries Minister. They know that he is always available and easy to find, unlike their local member.

It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of the amended motion. This Government was elected on the platform of jobs, jobs, jobs. We rolled up our sleeves and we are working tirelessly to achieve our jobs target. It is a commitment to jobs across Queensland. This Government is genuinely committed to jobs in rural and regional Queensland. It is a Government that is working to meet its commitment to the people of Queensland. I know, because I am a member for a regional seat—the wonderful electorate of Mackay.

I direct honourable members to comments made by the Premier in this place yesterday on jobs and the National Competition Policy. His comments were alluded to earlier by the member for Caboolture and by the Minister for Primary Industries. The Premier said—

"I recognise the drive for National Competition Policy. I recognise that it is aimed at improving so-called service delivery, but I will never, nor will my Government, put economic rationalism ahead of jobs. That is what has gone on in this country for too long. That is why we need to be very firm about our position on this."

The Premier's comments were directly related to the cypress industry of Queensland.

Late last year, the Honourable Minister for Primary Industries officially opened the Augathella cypress mill. The mill is owned and operated by N. K. Collins Industries and employs 15 people. It is a major achievement for Queensland's primary industries, as it is for Augathella and surrounding districts. This Government recognises that many of our rural communities depend on the employment and dollars generated by our timber industry. And it is developments like the opening of the cypress mill in Augathella that are so sorely needed in rural and regional Queensland.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment of cypress pine millers to their employees and to rural Queensland. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Nev Collins, the operator of N. K. Collins Industries, who boasts more than 50 years' experience in the sawmilling industry. The Augathella sawmill is but one in a total of five operated by N. K. Collins Industries that support the economies of towns along the Warrego Highway—towns like Dulacca, Surat, Roma and Mungallala. I also note that, like four other sawmills, the Augathella mill processes cypress pine exclusively.

In Queensland, we have built an enviable domestic and international reputation with quality structural and flooring products built on the cypress industry. DPI Forestry sells up to 130,000 cubic metres of cypress pine each year. A further 40,000 cubic metres, on average, are harvested annually from private land. When this total is milled, almost half of it is sold either interstate or overseas. Mr Collins' \$750,000 investment in Augathella will ensure the continuation of employment and industry for the town. It is a sign of his commitment to towns like Augathella that Mr Collins rebuilds older mills in their original locations rather than centralising his operations.

I understand that the Honourable Minister for Primary Industries will be invited to open the rebuilt mill also operated by N. K. Collins Industries in Mitchell later this year. The Mitchell mill will replace the earlier mill that had been destroyed by fire. To be in a position to open two mills in far-western

Queensland within six or seven months speaks volumes for the commitment of Mr Collins. It is a commitment that this Government will deliver and keep on delivering.

It is important to appreciate that the timber industry is Queensland's seventh-largest manufacturing sector, but it is also important to note where much of that work is done, that is, in rural and regional Queensland. The Honourable Minister for Primary Industries announced this Government's commitment to increasing native timber plantations to support future expansion of the native forest industry. For the timber industry in general, the Government is working to put in place a forward-looking industry strategy to ensure a viable and profitable industry in the next century. This Government is passionate about rural and regional Queensland. This Government is committed to creating jobs in rural and regional Queensland.

**Hon. V. P. LESTER** (Keppel—NPA) (6.33 p.m.): I rise to support this motion tonight—indeed, with much pleasure. The western Queensland cypress industry is worth some \$30m annually to the Queensland economy and supports some 2,000 direct and indirect jobs the length and breadth of the cypress pine belt. But looking at those figures in isolation does not truly do justice to the huge contribution the cypress industry makes and how much towns like Millmerran, Inglewood, Injune, Roma, Chinchilla and Wandoan depend upon it. It is industries like the western cypress industry which underpin the entire local economies and the community's way of life. Those timber jobs support families, who support the schools, the hospitals, the banks and the corner stores. If we take away the timber industry, we take away their income, their families and, inevitably, the town.

It is obvious from debates about the timber industry that many people are just not aware of the significance of the industry to rural and regional communities and will not accept that the timber industry is environmentally sustainable. We have seen it with the western cypress industry and the bureaucrats' advice to the Labor Government. And we are seeing it again in the South East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement debate. But it is more than disappointing when people who should know better try to write off the significance and the value of this industry to our local communities and to Queensland to pursue their own extreme and irrational political agenda.

On that note, I was disgusted but not surprised to read the ridiculous assertions by Aila Keto in the Courier-Mail on Monday and her logically devoid attempt to discount the south-east Queensland native timber industry. I know that some members opposite actually share my views, but I caution them because Ms Keto well and truly has their very own Natural Resources Minister's ear. For it is Ms Keto who is guiding the Minister down her extreme and naive, politically stupid path through the RFA process. The timber industry, the timber towns, the timber workers and the Australian Workers Union know it. And those members on the Treasury benches know it. Their Government's jobs rhetoric is just that—rhetoric—when it comes to the timber industry.

The Labor Party's policy is committed to a transition out of the native timber industry—code for shutting down the native timber industry. That is what it is about. That means a loss of jobs, a loss of families from those districts and, of course, the loss of services. Despite the protestations of the Deputy Premier, that is what it says. Drew Hutton has been quoting the policy in regional newspapers. In place of the timber industry, the Natural Resources Minister and even the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade are going to establish booming industries, such as flower picking, rock painting and ecotourism. Goodness me! They say that that is going to do a lot of good. I can assure them that it did not do much good in the Wide Bay and Ravenshoe districts.

What has been the industry's assessment—not from a National Party point of view but from AWU organiser Damien Green? In the Bundaberg News Mail yesterday, he said—

"The AWU has been lobbying state and federal governments to take a pro-industry, pro-jobs approach to the regional forest agreement in south-east Queensland."

The article continued—

"The AWU and Burnett Sawmill management both scoffed at the state government's latest idea of turning logging sites into eco-tourism areas. Mr Green said the government was being held to ransom by environmentalists who predominantly lived in inner-city Brisbane."

I noted with interest the Beattie Labor Government's backflip between Saturday's Courier-Mail and Tuesday's newspaper. Our Primary Industries Minister trotted out the bureaucratic waffle in Saturday's newspaper, but by Tuesday there was a sudden backflip to assure those timber towns that the Labor Government—

"... was about giving security and certainty to the timber industry, and I strongly support maintaining the status quo in relation to cypress pine allocations to local millers."

In fact, the Premier even gave an assurance about those jobs in this Parliament yesterday.

Time expired.