



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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FORESTRY AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (2.43 p.m.): I might also say how pleased we are to see our students here. It is very good indeed.

I am grateful for the chance to speak on the Forestry Amendment Bill as it gives me the opportunity to relay to the Parliament some of the brewing concerns in regional south-east Queensland regarding the Beattie Government's proposed regional forest agreement. From the start, I should point out that it is erroneous to call it a regional forest agreement, because it is really not. It is not an agreement that truly represents all of those people with a stake or an interest in south-east Queensland's Crown native forests. If honourable members think I am joking, they should have been in Gympie last Monday to see the concern of those shire chairmen, councillors, sawmillers and other interested community groups.

It is not an agreement because the vast majority of genuine stakeholders were not consulted and were not afforded the opportunity to contribute to it. This is a terrible shame. While it was officially termed a "heads of agreement" on its signing, in the stark light of day it is little more than a deal brokered by the Beattie Government to meet its political objective of closing down the Crown native forest. One only has to consider the agenda of so many in the green movement, the way they have carried on in recent times and some of the outrageous claims they have made. The signatories to that deal represent but a fraction of those who depend on the forest for their livelihood or who have a stake or interest in the forest and the manner in which it is managed. Those signatories included three conservation groups, only one industry group and the Beattie Government. What about the workers? What about the real people? What about the business people? What about the people who really count such as shire chairmen and so on? They have all been literally ignored.

The Beattie Government has made much of the fact—and the Premier laid it on thick again yesterday in the Parliament—that this was supposedly a remarkable compromise reached through skilled negotiation. Negotiation with what or with whom? When we shovel away the rhetoric, the egotistical chest beating, the froth and bubble, and take a clinical look at how this so-called agreement was reached, we find that it is a different story. The reality is that we had Labor's conservation and biological diversity policy, which provided for a quaintly termed "transition strategy" out of native forest harvesting—in short, closing the industry down. We had three green groups which the Beattie Government depends on for electoral support serving up their extremist demands. We had one industry group representing just one of the forest users with a gun held to its head as regards its future.

There was no community involvement, no Forest Protection Society involvement, no contractor involvement and no trail rider involvement. There was a huge showing of people at a rally that I addressed. I was surprised at the hundreds of people who turned up for that rally—trail bikers, forest walkers and many others. All of them were very worried about their right to use the forest. Beekeepers were another group who were left out of the process. There was also no local government involvement—can members believe it—and no grazier involvement. What sort of a deal is that? It is certainly a one-sided, one way, awful, unrealistic, unsustainable deal.

There was no professional involvement in the final negotiations. The Department of Natural Resources, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Primary Industries were, believe it or not, excluded. The forestry industry's peak professional body, the Institute of Foresters of

Australia, Queensland Division, was also left out. They are the leading body of professional resource managers and scientists with a membership of professionals working in forest growing, timber processing, forest management consultancies, forest planning, conservation and recreation groups. A group like this—an academic, intelligent group with practical experience—were left out. Much of that membership comprises officers from within DPI, DNR and the Parks and Wildlife Service. They forwarded a submission to the Government regarding the RFA, but it is obvious from reading it and comparing it with the final deal that was struck that the Premier and his deputy, who had carriage of this deal, ignored the advice of these experts. There was not even any worker involvement. Or was there? Did the AWU sell out its members like its faction leader in the Beattie Government, the Deputy Premier?

Aside from the fact that this proposal is based on a political deal rather than science, I find it appalling that none of these legitimate stakeholders were even afforded the opportunity to be involved in the process. The Premier and his Cabinet can crow all they like about the apparent support for this deal from its signatories, but that support does not extend to all those other legitimate stakeholders who were and remain shut out. One only has to spend some time travelling around regional south-east Queensland to work that out pretty quickly.

The people who depend on the forests are getting worried and they are getting angry. They are worried about their futures, and why should they not be? They are worried about their families and they are worried about their communities. They are very angry that they have not been included and are still not being included. They are angry because the Beattie Government has reduced their jobs and their lifestyle to something that can be gambled away in some sort of quick fix political stunt. Mark my words: the Beattie Government has ignored these people at its peril. They can see through the glossy PR job. They can see that there is no substance to this deal.

Again, the experts—groups such as the Forest Protection Society and the Institute of Foresters—have criticised the inadequacy of the social impact assessments undertaken by the Beattie Government. They point out that other users of the forests, such as graziers, beekeepers and recreational users, have not been taken into account. In fact, the institute bluntly states that both the social assessment report and the directions report were flawed because they ignored these users. The institute draws the conclusion that—

"Consequently, the public has not been made aware of the full economic and social costs of the proposed scenarios. Before an RFA is reached, there is a clear need to recognise that the economic analysis underpinning the range of RFA scenarios presented in the directions report may significantly understate the social and economic flow-on impacts of the options proposed."

Needless to say, the Beattie Government did not follow that advice and recognise the social and economic impacts before the RFA deal was finalised. We are seeing the evidence of that in the regions now as the Beattie Government's deal starts to bite.

Aside from the social element, the Beattie Government's proposed RFA is also remiss on environmental grounds. The deal is based on the mistaken and extremist philosophy that human interaction with native forests is something that should be avoided. It is based on the premise that locking up the forests and throwing away the key will somehow improve the environmental value. It ignores the fact that the Crown native forest is essentially already under a reserve system. It ignores the fact that logging, grazing, beekeeping and trail riding are sustainable and can be conducted without destroying the forest.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! Some people might not be as riveted as I am by this speech. I ask honourable members to extend courtesy to the member speaking.

Mr LESTER: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. It just shows how little interest members of the Labor Party have in these very important matters. They are unable to comprehend this well-researched speech full of fact, so they just carry on and have jokes between themselves.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. My good friend over there doth defame me. It is his good friend from the National Party, who is sharing a joke with the Deputy Government Whip, who was making that laugh.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr LESTER: Actually, my National Party colleague was just trying to explain to these people just what this is about. The submission from the Queensland division of the Institute of Foresters of Australia states—

"While the IFA supports ecologically and sustainable forest management (ESFM) including a strategy of conservation in reserves supported by managed production forest, we consider the options development process has been significantly devalued due to a failure to recognise the conservation value of managed forests."

That submission goes on to refer to one of the State Government's own reports, entitled Towards Reserve Options for Forest Taxa in South-East Queensland: Taxa at risk, threats, conservation requirements and recovery planning. Members on the other side should listen to this, particularly the Minister, who I would hope has a more practical appreciation of these issues than some of his colleagues. That report states—

"Coincidentally, a major Government study of forest-related taxa at risk in SEQ found that the greatest threat to taxa is not posed by selective harvesting but by other factors not directly addressed in the RFA process."

The report gives examples such as fire, disease, roads, railways, chemical pollution, waste disposal, mining and quarrying. Under the proposal, 425,000 hectares will be set aside to existing locked up reserved areas. That is 425,000 hectares added to an already underresourced and inadequately managed national parks and reserve network. This is a massive boost to the parks and reserves network, but by no means has there been a commensurate boost to the budget of the Parks and Wildlife Service to manage it. In fact, \$28.4m has been cut from this year's budget. That is a disgrace. This is a Labor Budget that even the Greens were compelled to condemn for its short-sightedness and lack of commitment to the environment.

These 425,000 hectares are to be added to a parks and reserve network that, through the neglect of the Beattie Government, has been allowed to run down and become infested with weeds and become a breeding ground for pests such as feral pigs. This is another 425,000 hectares that, through this neglect and the cessation of harvesting, which is often essential to maintaining the health of forest systems, will become a massive fire hazard waiting to happen—a fire hazard just like that facing Fraser Island as we speak. And we know what happened to former Senator Richardson. So massive has the neglect been that Noel Playford, chairman of the community advisory committee for the Fraser Island World Heritage area, has warned that the island might lose its World Heritage listing. He has warned that everything could be destroyed in the event of a bushfire. I hate to say it, but that is a distinct possibility. Again, the Institute of Foresters—the experts—supports those concerns in its submission, which states—

"Most potential disturbances can be effectively managed by informal reservation or management prescription and in reality, managed production forests are frequently able to offer superior protection to biodiversity through maintaining a management presence and funding superior infrastructure. For example, fire was often identified as a significant risk to taxa. In truth, severe wildfires are more likely in poorly managed reserves than in managed forests."

That is a fact. Based on the Beattie Government's track record of environmental mismanagement, that is the sort of situation we can look forward to when that 425,000 hectares is added to the reserves.

Once this 425,000 hectares of forest is set aside, there will be some 200,000 hectares available for logging. Boral has been bought out with Queensland taxpayers' money and sent away to invest that money in other States such as Tasmania. That State Government is actually trying to develop a timber industry to create jobs. Hyne & Son will be helped to invest in hoop pine, but there will be some 35 sawmillers and salvage operators left to secure a large portion or, for some, all of their wood supplies from the remaining 200,000 hectares.

In its heads of agreement the Beattie Government stated there would be no clear-felling of the Crown native hardwood forest, but in order to meet the resultant demand for sawlogs, the minimum girth size of millable logs has been reduced to only 40 centimetres—little more than that for clear-felling. For some forest species that intensity of harvest may in fact be beneficial, but for others it could be catastrophic to the environmental attributes of the forest.

And knowing full well how some of the environmental groups operate—and some of those were signatories to the Beattie Government's deal—in a couple of years' time, after the harvesters have been through the forest in this manner, those groups will take a 60 Minutes crew in, survey the carnage, make all sorts of accusations and mount another campaign for the Government of the day to end this dreadful practice and close the forest down entirely, regardless of the cost to the community. The so-called 25-year wood supply agreements for which this Bill provides will not be worth a scrap. That is why people are so concerned about knowing what to do for the future. They do not know what is going to happen to them.

And while the Beattie Government expects this area of forest to support those millers for up to 25 years, it has ruled out enhanced silviculture for no scientific reason—no logical reason—other than that it is against the Greens' policy. I have seen silviculture, and it does work. If those areas of forest are to have any hope of sustaining the intensity of logging, enhanced silviculture will be absolutely essential.

At the same time, the Beattie Government has announced that plantations will take the place of the Crown resource. But as yet, the Beattie Government has not put one seedling in the ground. That is a disgrace. My friend the member for Crows Nest made this point quite succinctly when debate

commenced on this Bill the other night. I noticed that it caused a flurry of defensive activity as the Minister tried to give the Parliament an explanation the following day that expressions of interest had been called for the propagation of up to half a million seedlings. That is a long way short of the 10 million trees required and does not get around the fact that not one tree has yet been planted. The Minister still has not provided any detail on exactly where are those 1,000 hectares on which those trees are to be planted, or the remaining 4,000 hectares that are needed at the very minimum.

Aside from the obvious shortcomings in detail on that issue, there remain other concerns about the feasibility of plantations— even if the trees were planted on the very day of the Minister's announcement—as to whether they could supply sufficient quantities of sawlogs to meet demand in 25 years. Those concerns have been raised with the Opposition by sawmillers, by forest experts and by professional groups, such as the Institute of Foresters. Given those concerns, it is difficult— if not impossible—to offer support for the provisions in this Bill giving 25-year wood supply agreements. Any person with a shred of commonsense would err on the side of caution and allow more time to be sure that supply was going to be there.

I have touched on but a few of the mass of concerns, which the Opposition shares with other Queenslanders who depend on the forests for their livelihoods and their lifestyles, that the Beattie Government has created with its forest deal. The Deputy Premier was all very indignant this morning and cited old newspaper clippings and support from one industry group to defend his proposed RFA. He may not have caught up yet, but the facts are that the people have seen through the whole thing. They are concerned, they are unhappy, they are upset, and they are unsure.

I believe that we need to reconsider this whole issue. Why are groups of people at Gympie and everywhere else opposed to this? Why are members getting heaps of letters from very concerned people? The simple fact is that the Labor Government has duded the people of Queensland, the forestry workers and, indeed, everybody else involved in this whole industry—those people who continue to generate employment. I ask members to think about the huge amount of employment that the forestry industry creates. It is absolutely enormous. It involves trucks, fuel, machinery and workers.

Time expired.
