



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Hansard 11 March 1999

RURAL QUEENSLAND

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (6.03 p.m.): I second the motion. Yet again, we are seeing the early signs of a Labor Government intent on forcing maximum anguish on Queensland's rural communities. Not only has every grazier in this State been accused of breeding dingos to make a quick buck but also we now have a State Government trying to cement into legislation a very worrying precedent. We have a State Government that is prepared to come out and say, "If you own a farm and the Government takes a major asset off you, then there will not be a single cent in compensation." That is absolutely disgraceful. That is the message that the Minister for Natural Resources has been sending to the rural community—to every producer and to every family in our rural communities. Quite frankly, the Minister has knocked the stuffing out of the bush people. That is what has happened.

Tonight's motion is about doing something positive. It is about getting bipartisan support for positive initiatives. Tonight's motion is all about protecting jobs in the forestry industry, it is about protecting the assets of farmers and it is about entrenching the fundamental principle of fair compensation. Any attempt to vote against this motion or any attempt to amend the motion to dilute its intent and its conviction will be an attempt to run away from responsible government.

Tonight, this Parliament should unite in its determination to protect rural people, their jobs and indeed their industries. It is clear from recent media reports that the Minister for Natural Resources does not understand the ramifications of his decision not to pay compensation for lost water. It is clear that the Minister does not understand that water is the lifeblood of any rural operation. It is also clear that he does not understand that water equates to jobs and to industry.

The protection of our environment is at a cost to all Queenslanders. It is a cost that all Queenslanders should share. It most certainly should not be incurred by primary producers alone. If this community as a whole makes a decision that we need to protect the delicate environmental qualities of our river systems, then the community as a whole must be prepared to incur the costs. Those costs should not be incurred solely by one section of the community. That is why the Beattie Government's decision to renege on a compensation commitment is such an injustice.

The impact of the State Government's decision not to compensate for the loss of water has ramifications far greater than the Minister realises. When people purchase their land, they do so knowing that it has a certain water allocation. That water allocation is reflected in the price that is paid for the land. Equally, when a bank lends money to a primary producer, guess what? One of the very first things that is taken into account is the producer's water allocation! Members can be assured that a proposal to reduce that allocation and offer no compensation has, unfortunately, caught the attention of every major bank. Members can also be assured that this decision has put yet another obstacle in the way of banks lending money to producers. In other words, there is yet another obstacle to more development, more industry and more jobs in rural Queensland.

Unless we reverse this decision here tonight, we are going to see a situation where potentially millions of dollars in production will be lost. Tonight's motion moved by the coalition not only fights for fair compensation but also it fights for job protection. With the Premier's professed commitment to jobs, jobs, jobs, I find it very difficult to understand how the Labor Party could indeed oppose such a motion.

In addition, the other night when I asked the Minister in this Chamber if there would be any job losses resulting from RFA agreements, he gave a very clear commitment that there would not be job losses. It is imperative that this House makes it a matter of record that we will not tolerate a single job lost as a result of the RFA process—not one single job. The regional forestry agreement process is not

only about protecting our vitally important forestry reserves but also it is about protecting jobs. We should be about having a balanced timber industry and we should be about ensuring no job losses. It is a very simple commitment to give to the timber industry and, indeed, no-one in this Chamber should be walking away from such a rock solid dedication to jobs.

Time expired.
