



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (6.45 p.m.): The Opposition has always supported an RFA based on science and not on emotion. That is backed up by the huge quantities of scientific research we undertook in Government on the forest industry— research that the Beattie Government has ignored because it does not suit its ideological agenda.

The coalition's position is crystal clear and always has been. As our motion on Tuesday night stated, we want a regional forest agreement based on an increase in jobs in the south-east Queensland hardwood timber industry through improved productivity, improved forest management and the development of hardwood plantations. But the position of those on the other side of the House flops about like a fish on a trawler's deck.

On Tuesday night we had the Environment Minister mouthing the unsubstantiated green line that the timber industry is not sustainable. He talked about the transition policy and about providing a measure of resource security in the long term for the industry. A measure of security? What about absolute security? Then he conceded that the RFA agenda is to close down the industry, when he said that resource security may be just non-State forest areas. At the same time he is moving to impose clearing and harvesting restrictions on freehold land. The Minister talked about new industries and opportunities in ancillary industries. It is the same old rhetoric the people of Maryborough heard when Fraser Island was shut down. Where are those jobs in the so-called ancillary industries in those areas? Those jobs have never appeared.

This just exposes that this Minister is not interested in science or in fact. He is blinkered by irrational and emotional ideology. What is his proof that the timber industry is unsustainable? A flawed computer-generated wood yield result that was based on the most negative assumptions! That is what the Government is hanging its hat on—one single run of a computer model, a result that has been used by the Beattie Government as the sole basis for all seven of the options in the directions report.

We have heard criticism from those on the other side that the RFA was not complete by mid 1998 when they took office. There is a simple reason for that: we were not going to base any decision on the future of the timber industry on anything but the most rigorous science. If that meant the process ran a little late, so be it. But at least the right result would have been delivered based on science, not politics and preference deals, as this Beattie Government has been trying to do.

The member for Warrego has consistently called on the Government to re-run the SKED models with alternative and more realistic parameters. I was pleased to learn that the Deputy Premier took his advice and commissioned two independent experts to examine the modelling. What have they found? Perhaps their findings back up what the coalition has been saying. Why does the Government not release the report so that we can all find out? I challenge the Government now to release that report.

We also heard on Tuesday night from the invisible man of the RFA debate, the Minister for Primary Industries—the Minister whose sole contribution has been to visit some timber towns and shake some hands, the Minister who is as far down the Cabinet pecking order as the jobs of timberworkers are down in the priorities of his colleague the Environment Minister.

Mr Palaszczuk interjected.

Mr LESTER: I have some advice for the member for Inala. He should take the concerns of those timberworkers in the timber towns to Cabinet with him and put them up. He should put his party politics and his preference deals behind him and stand up for those people in the Cabinet room. He should fight to give the south-east Queensland hardwood industry the same deal he gave the western Queensland cypress pine industry—no job losses and security of timber supplies. He should stand up for science and not the Socialist Left's emotional ideology.

Then we heard from the Deputy Premier, the Minister who is not too sure what his position is in all of this, the Minister who sold out his AWU faction——

Time expired.
