



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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NATURE CONSERVATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (11.09 p.m.): Forest recreation relies upon a finite, shrinking and non-renewable resource that is already at a premium within south-east Queensland. It is no wonder that any changes to the way forests are managed and used cause serious concerns within the recreation community. But what if Governments were able to both protect the conservation values of forests and provide the diversity of recreation experience the community desires?

The South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement has caused concern within the outdoor recreation community because of the potential changes to the public forest estate. But what is an RFA and how have outdoor recreation groups contributed to the decision that may well impact upon the way we use south-east Queensland forests for recreation?

This Bill represents another step backwards for the people who rely on, use and enjoy south-east Queensland's Crown native forests. The Bill represents the Beattie Government's complete accession to the ideological whims of a few extremist minority groups. The Bill is essentially about the Beattie Labor Government's drummed up excuse for a regional forest agreement. It represents the culmination of a deal by a Labor Government that is prepared to do whatever it takes to cling to office—a deal that traded off the futures of thousands of timberworkers in south-east Queensland, the futures of the rural and regional communities that depend on forest industries, the industries that depend upon the Crown native forests and the interests of those tens of thousands of people who use the forests for a whole host of recreational activities. It was a deal that traded off all that and more. For what? For a handful of green preferences in a few metropolitan marginal electorates. People's jobs, people's livelihoods and people's lifestyles were traded for votes that those opposite desperately need to help keep their sorry political hides on the Treasury benches.

The Beattie Government's deal is not a regional forest agreement by definition or by intent. Quite apart from the fact that it does not meet the criteria set out in the National Forest Policy Statement, the policy that the former Labor State Government and the former Labor Federal Government both endorsed never involved all the forest stakeholders. It did not involve the grazing industry. It did not involve the beekeeping industry. It did not involve the shire councils. It did not involve the timber towns. It did not involve the tourism industry. It did not involve the workers. The Government did not take any notice of them and it did not keep its word on a lot of things it promised them, and the Minister knows that.

The policy did not involve the motorbike riders. They came to see me specifically and said that they had not been consulted at all, let alone listened to. It did not include the four-wheel drivers, the horse riders or the hikers. After all, these forests are for people—for recreation. All it involved was just a few select interest groups that do not speak for the community but speak only for the narrow interests of a few. Not only were those other stakeholders not privy to this deal; they were not even consulted.

I listened to the Minister's second-reading speech when he introduced this Bill.

Mr Welford: You didn't listen.

Mr LESTER: I did listen. I was here and I listened with great interest. I have listened to the various speeches made in this Parliament by Government members regarding this deal to close down the forests. While there has been plenty of talk by Government members, there has not been a lot of listening.

Mr Mickel interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! The member for Logan will not interject from other than his allocated seat.

Mr LESTER: That is exactly the point I am making about not listening. Government members do not know what they are talking about, and they interject when they are not in their correct seats.

Mr Sullivan: I was listening to you.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr LESTER: Thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker. Despite all the rhetoric, the people out there whose lives are going to be very much affected by the Government's deal and this Bill will do nothing to support what the Government is doing. The graziers, the beekeepers, the native foliage people and the recreational users do not believe the Government's hollow claims. They do not believe them because the Government shut them out of the deal. It did not even show them the decency of consulting with them and will not give them a straight answer.

A true regional forest agreement is based on the principles established under the National Forest Policy Statement agreed to by the State and the Commonwealth in 1992. That policy sought to provide balance to what has been an historically divisive and often emotive issue—the management of native forests.

The policy established 11 goals to achieve that balance: the protection of conservation values; the sustainable economic use of native forest and plantations; the harmonisation of the land use decision-making process between the State and the Commonwealth; the sustainable management of the private forest estate; the increase in the total area of land dedicated to timber plantations; the provision of reliable, high-quality water supplies to forested lands; the exploitation of other economically viable forest activities including tourism, recreation, grazing and mineral exploration; the expansion of job opportunities and the improvement of the skills of those working in the forest industries; the fostering of community knowledge of ecologically sustainable management; the increased effort of research and development for native forests; and the fulfilment of our international obligations.

Regional forest agreements were designed to achieve those goals, having regard to the assessment of: the environmental values of forests, including old growth, wilderness, endangered species, national estate values and world heritage values; indigenous heritage values; economic values of forested areas and forest industries; social values; and the principles of ecologically sustainable management.

RFAs were intended as a joint innovation between the State and Federal Governments to achieve these objectives. They are intended to run for 20 years or so to provide long-term security for everyone with a stake in the forests. They were intended to provide for the establishment of a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system, the ecologically sustainable management and use of Crown native forests and the continued development of viable and successful forest industries.

These were the objectives or criteria that the Federal coalition Government sought to enshrine in the legislation so as to ensure ongoing, long-term security for all forest users and all forest values. They were criteria that we all surely support. They were criteria that even this Beattie Labor Government claims to support and claims to have provided for in the trumped-up political deal that it now seeks to sell as an RFA. Yet, in another of Labor's great displays of hypocrisy, that legislation called the Regional Forest Agreements Bill 1998 was blocked in the Senate by the Labor Government.

The Opposition does not support the Beattie Government's proposal for an RFA and we cannot support this Bill. This Bill sets about introducing the Beattie Government's deal, which does not achieve the criteria for a true RFA and which does not fulfil the wishes of the wider community.

The Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2000 does not satisfy the requirements of active recreation in south-east Queensland. This includes the various horse-riding disciplines, four-wheel driving, trail and mountain bike riding and fossicking that currently enjoy the use of State forest lands. Achieving security for the forest industry and protecting our outstanding natural heritage is an important process and should have been achieved under a genuine South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement—SEQRFA—process but it was not.

As part of the Beattie Government's RFA process, some aspects of State forests and timber reserve land in south-east Queensland were assessed. The recreation assessment was inconclusive and was not able to be sustained. The only real outcomes are a highly questionable timber yield over the next 25 years, the withdrawal of the Federal Government's and community support and the Labor Government's commitment to the conservation movement for its support in the last election.

There are claims of comprehensive consultation with stakeholders, yet the Minister acknowledged the lack of recognition of and consultation with recreation interests. Recreation was not

represented on any of the RFA committees and was refused participation when lobbying. In conciliation, the Minister authorised the establishment of the forest recreation reference group and provided \$35,000 in funding. The end result was an agreement between conservation and timber. The SEQRFA was not welcomed by all stakeholders as claimed by the Minister. Why was it that the timber industry and conservationists were the only stakeholders to sign the agreement? So much for consultation!

The Federal Government consistently refuses to accept the outcomes contained in the Beattie deal for south-east Queensland forests and will not contribute one cent towards its implementation—and rightly so. This deal does not meet the RFA criteria and is not representative or consultative.

The introduction of this Bill establishes goodwill with conservation. For the remaining stakeholders, and especially recreation interests, it creates uncertainty over access and the principles of multi-use by our citizens. The Bill as introduced provides for the legislative framework to set aside around 425,000 hectares of State forest and timber reserve land as protected areas under the Nature Conservation Act 1992.

For conservation, it doubles the current protected area estate, at considerable expense to recreation. The directions report clearly enunciates under scenario F that areas of high recreational site significance—a combination of popularity, visitation, quality and condition—in south-east Queensland's State forests is estimated at a loss of 50% of horse-riding sites, 60% of four-wheel driving and trail bike riding and around 30% of mountain bike riding sites. Recently, fossickers have become aware of the proposed legislation and estimate a 60% loss of sites.

These are some significant losses for outdoor recreation in south-east Queensland— especially for an activity that is estimated to account for 41,597,029 participants in a 12-month period and which is growing. That substantially exceeds the combined attendance at all the annual sporting events of the Broncos, the Bullets, the Reds and the Bulls.

Monetarily, the estimated yearly expenditure is in excess of \$2 billion. This is significant and is substantiated in the FRRG's June 1999 response to the south-east Queensland regional forest agreement directions report. In the Minister's second-reading speech he declares that virtually all existing recreational activities presently taking place on the land can be accommodated on one or more classes of protected areas, with the final distribution of certain uses requiring careful assessment.

Surely the Minister also understands that regulations in Queensland are not in line with other States and do not permit domestic animals in protected areas. In practical terms, this means that a resident will not be able to walk his dog in Daisy Hill State Forest without a permit. Horse riding is not permitted in protected areas, save those with recognised trails such as the Bicentennial National Trail. Fossickers are excluded entirely.

The FRRG was briefed that careful assessments would be undertaken under the multi-use management planning system— MUMPS. Is it not true that recently this methodology was dropped for the purpose of the SEQRFA? Why is that? Is the Government in a hurry to achieve results without due process? Does conservation object to the use of MUMPS as an objective process to accommodate other users of the public estate?

The amendments to the Bill are quite simple and, in fact, assist the Minister in keeping his promises to recreation interests at last year's 4 July forum. What recreational users want is: proper definition and inclusion of recreation in protected areas; the clarification and inclusion of a definition of recreation; improvement of the definition of "ecologically sustainable use" to better justify alternative uses such as recreation; defined management principles of a forest reserve; modification of the purpose of a forest reserve from an interim measure to a dedicated protected area; and the elimination of the forest reserve sunset clause.

This Bill seeks to take away continued access for recreational uses. It seeks to push the timber industry out into an ever-decreasing area of resource. It seeks to lock up the forest and throw away the key. The Crown native forests are public assets and all Queenslanders and Australians should be entitled to use them. For the Beattie Government to lock them up on the whim of a few minority groups is wrong. It is a decision that has not been based on science. It is a decision that has not been based on community consultation. It is a decision that will not benefit this State.

We will not legitimise what is little more than another of Labor's grubby political deals. The Opposition cannot support this Bill. We will be opposing it all the way.
