



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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NATURE CONSERVATION [FOREST RESERVES] REGULATION 2000

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (5.26 p.m.): The lands under the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement have a high conservation value and warrant a high level of protection. Appropriate protected area tenures will be determined by the government after discussions with traditional owners, stakeholders and special interest groups, including those with both recreational and commercial interests. Discussions will be aimed at accommodating those interests as far as possible both short and long term, while protecting the nature conservation and cultural heritage values of the lands and recognising the practical needs of managing the forest.

In recognition of the importance of these lands to the Queensland outdoor recreation community, the then Minister for Natural Resources formed an advisory group, the Forest Recreation Reference Group. This group was established to address outdoor recreation in forests and has a wide base with members including those from the Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation, the Queensland Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs, Australian Trail Horse Riders Association—Queensland branch, the Queensland Cyclists Association, the Queensland Orienteering Association, the Bushwalking Federation of Australia, the Queensland Ornithological Society—and I can spell that for any National Party members if they wish. It also includes representatives from the Dual Motorcycle Riders Association, Tread Lightly Australia, a representative of local government, a conservation representative, Department of Tourism Sport and Racing, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Natural Resources.

The primary role of the Forest Recreation Reference Group was to develop an acceptable plan for resolving competing recreational interests in the public forest estate.

Mr Seeney: Who wrote this for you?

Mr CUMMINS: Does the member want me to spell something again? Sunshine Coast residents have long been recognised as people who love the outdoors and appreciate improvements to their recreation and who have strong environmental considerations that are well covered in the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement. We do not use American spellcheck either. Do not worry about that American stuff.

This plan would maximise the full diversity of outdoor—

Mr Seeney: Tell us what you think, tell us what you know.

Mr CUMMINS: If the member would listen to it, he will hear what I am thinking. I am representing the Sunshine Coast people. Labor is in there now. There are three Labor members up there—just as many as there are Liberals across the state. That is how good you have done. This plan would maximise the full diversity of outdoor recreational access and use the south-east Queensland forestry area.

I stand proudly here as the first Labor member to represent the electorate of Kawana. In the rapidly growing electorate of Kawana, more and more residents are appreciating the access given to public open space for recreation purposes.

Mr Seeney: What about the workers who lost their jobs? Did Davo tell you about the workers?

Mr CUMMINS: Davo who? He is not here. As population pressure increases—

Mr Seeney: You are here. Tell us what you are going to do for them.

Mr CUMMINS: He is very thankful for you blokes. As population pressures increase, these areas are becoming more and more valuable and appreciated. They need to be properly managed, and community involvement in their future management is a critical part of the process already commenced.

Consultation is now more focused at the local level and relates to specific forest areas. Therefore, subregional forums were established in early 2000. They are for the south and west areas, Gold Coast to main range, north coast—that great area that put in three Labor members, as many members as there are Liberals right across this great state—the Wide Bay-Burnett area and the Gladstone area. These subregional forums have been meeting regularly and currently have around 2,000 members showing regular interest. That is further proof of the positive consultation process that the Beattie government, which was overwhelmingly returned, is renowned for. The subregional forum members provide valuable information about the recreational use of forests directly to the tenure allocation planners as well as highlighting which recreation groups should be involved in tenure allocation for individual or groups of forest reserves.

The Nature Conservation Act provides a number of protected area tenures which can accommodate a range of outdoor recreational uses. For example, recreational horse riding—

Mr Seeney: You should have used smaller words for him, Rod.

Mr CUMMINS: I can spell anything here. Recreational horse riding is not allowed in national parks but is permitted in conservation parks. This range of tenures allows us to retain recreational access to south-east Queensland's forests while maintaining the integrity of the protected area system. This is obviously what our residents right across south-east Queensland want. The planning process will determine the appropriate and sustainable uses for each forest while ensuring the long-term protection of our natural and cultural values.

The South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement includes the immediate protection of approximately 425,000 hectares of land from further logging. The remaining areas of south-east Queensland state forests and timber reserves will be logged once more in accordance with environmental guidelines. Then they, too, will be added to the conservation reserve system. This represents an historic opportunity to conserve the great forests of south-east Queensland in a world-class reserve of 1.25 million hectares. This is an opportunity that does not come along every generation.

In part, it is created by the willingness of the timber industry to assess its own future and the future of the publicly owned natural resources upon which it relies. The industry decided to take the long-term sustainable future—a smart move. It is also possible because of the vision of the conservation groups, which could see the possibilities for a world-class forest reserve system and worked tirelessly to see a dream realised for the whole of the community.

The Beattie Labor government had the courage to see this as well and pursued the agreement with vigour, despite the attempts of rivals to scuttle it for their own political gains. It is a pity that they have not learned from their lesson on 17 February, when the community rejected their tunnel vision. That is why, although I sit on this side of the House, I represent the other side of the House. It is now up to the other users, such as the recreationalists, beekeepers, foliage harvesters and the traditional owners to see the potential for a great southern forest reserve and work with the government to deliver a system that allows appropriate use but retains the natural and cultural values of these places forever. That process has started and has widespread support.

As time passes, the value of our protected forests will grow and grow not only for the local people to use and enjoy as a basis for an expanding ecotourism industry but as an essential part of a world-class reserve system that conserves our natural heritage for all time. Short-sighted thinking now will limit this great opportunity for an investment in a sustainable future. Instead of trying to wreck the most successful forest agreement in the nation, the opposition should be trying to convince their federal colleagues to emulate it. But instead they wheel in the wrecker from the west, 'Iron Bar' Tuckey, and try to undermine it, try to divide communities and practise the politics of division, which will soon see them thrown out. No wonder they are so thin on the ground.

If the members opposite were fair dinkum about the welfare of regional and rural Queensland, they would be embracing this agreement, because it delivers certainty, economic benefits and jobs to communities that need it most. John Howard reckons he is listening to the people, but he should lend his hearing aid to the member for Keppel and the member for Callide because, if they want to proceed with wrecking an agreement that the community is embracing, they certainly need it.
