



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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NATURE CONSERVATION [FOREST RESERVES] REGULATION 2000

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (5.16 p.m.): I second the disallowance motion moved by the member for Keppel, and I do so with a heavy heart; because there is no need at all for members to be here today disallowing this motion in relation to the regional forest assessment and the locking up of further land in the south-east corner of the state.

I was the minister in charge of natural resources when we started the regional forest assessment. The process was all about putting together an agreement to take the debate out of the forest. The idea was to try, once and for all, to have some sort of continuity throughout the state so that people could work and live together, so that the people who work the forests live in the forests, and the urban community would know that the forests are being well managed. So this process was commenced.

An enormous amount of money was put into research and scientific studies and undertaking enormous social and economic studies. A huge amount of work was done involving many thousands of hours. Collectively, between the many people involved, hundreds of thousands of hours of work were put in. That work was undertaken virtually on a doorknocking basis in the various timber towns, trying to pull together information about what made those towns tick, why people shopped in those towns, where they sent their kids to school and where they were going to send their kids to school—all the things that make and break those communities.

After an enormous amount of work, that information was put together and assessed, and it was concluded that yes, obviously there was a very important social fabric in those towns, there was a need to ensure that those towns could survive and that the process of logging could continue. An enormous amount of work was also put into the scientific assessment of the forest itself as to what is a manageable level of logging. All sorts of assessments were carried out. But at the end of the day, after all that work was done, the government made a purely political decision and locked up most of the forest. Basically, we wasted our time. We wasted millions of dollars doing all that work, because we ended up with a political decision. So I am disappointed that, at the end of the day, that process, which was started in good faith by all political parties involved, came down to a political decision.

I think the government said that it made that decision based on the agreement with four lobby groups: the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, the Queensland Timber Board, the Queensland Conservation Council and the Wilderness Society. What about the rest of the stakeholders who were involved with the forests as well? There is an enormous number of them. But at the end of the day, a purely political decision was made to lock up the forests. What is that going to achieve? What are we aiming to do? I have no doubt that the people who are saying that we should lock up the forests want to ensure that there is something for their children and for the future. No doubt their intentions are quite good.

However, we believe very strongly that it is the wrong way to go for several reasons. One, in particular, is that by locking the forest up you do not actually make it better; in many instances, you make it worse. You have to manage the land. I come from the land myself. If I do not manage the land properly, it will be overrun. It will not produce and it will not be able to provide for the future.

An interesting example is in the United States where they have been through this. They have been through locking up the forests and throwing away the keys. In many instances, those forests have

burned from boundary to boundary with devastating consequences. In the recent US presidential campaigns both candidates committed nearly \$A50 billion over 15 years to harvesting and removing trees from national parks and reserves to try to reduce the amount of timber and fuel in those forests.

I have here a very interesting article that I would like to share with members because it is particularly important. It relates to America, which is a little different from Australia. I also have information here that relates to Australia, but this article sums it up fairly well. It is an article from the *Washington Post* written by a guy named William Booth. It states—

With the embers of this year's wildfires still smouldering across the west of the United States, plans are being made for radical changes in forest management.

A coalition of highly politicised interests appears ready to push the federal government into restoring great swaths of public forest by thinning out billions of trees and returning a more-natural cycle of prescribed burning to the land.

After the pruning is done—some time around 2015 if Congress and the next administration agree with the plan—millions of hectares of dry, pine forests in the west would look far different.

Entire landscapes would be transformed from crowded stands of trees, which can fuel catastrophic fires, into more-manicured, open settings of tall, older trees scattered here and there, with grasses and shrubs underneath.

It would look, as the foresters describe it, more 'park-like' and would burn more gently.

The forests last looked like that when the first European settlers arrived to displace the indigenous people, who themselves managed the forests with fire. 'This is just a huge challenge' said Harry Croft, deputy director for fire and aviation at the US Forest Service, who wrote a 1995 internal report that laid bare the need to address forest health and the heavy fuel loads in the woods. 'These ecosystems are so out of whack'. Many Americans, who have grown accustomed to dense green forests, might not admire the appearance of the more heavily managed but more 'natural' forests. Forest service officials privately fear a backlash against the plan. Yet the hope is that after so much effort, the forests would return to a more fire-resistant state.

So that is basically what has happened over there. That seems to be the trend across America. I made a trip there to look at sustainable logging in native forests and I found that that certainly was the attitude. What had been done in the past was wrong. It was an evolutionary thing that we thought was right, but at the end of the day that is not the case.

The same thing has happened here in Australia. In Australia the country has changed dramatically since white man has taken over. The Aborigines used to burn the country. The types of trees have changed. The whole landscape has changed. If members read the journals of the old explorers, they will see that they talk about what the landscape was like when they first came out here—apart from all the fires that were burning in the country. There were quotes such as 'A man could gallop a horse without impediment and see whole miles ahead.' That was a reference to places where now one cannot even walk through because the trees have totally taken over. This will happen and we have to manage it.

I appeal to members of the government not to lock up the forests. The forests can be managed. We can have both. We can have a sustainable business operating with sustainable logging—very careful logging—and we can manage our forests. A report of the Local Government Association dealing with national parks in Queensland pointed out quite clearly that there is chronic underfunding of national parks. There is not enough money for firebreaks or the management of the forests. So if we cannot manage our forests, what will happen when a fire breaks out? It will burn from wall to wall and clean the whole lot out. We will lose not only the trees but also the ecosystems and the animals in them.

I appeal to members of the government to think very carefully. Do not go down this line. I passionately believe that we are doing the wrong thing.

Mr Lester: Imagine Fraser Island.

Mr HOBBS: Fraser Island is a very good example of what will happen in due course. It will happen—just as the sun rises in the east. It will burn. We do not want that to happen; nobody wants that to happen. We want to make sure that we have a pristine environment. We want to make sure that we have a good environment and a great place that we and our children can visit and admire. We can do that. I understand that we must have certain areas of old growth forest. That is very important, but we have to be able to maintain a balance. It so important. We have missed a great opportunity to get it right. The politics have not been taken out of the forest. The idea of the RFAs was to take politics out of the forest. That has not been done. We totally oppose what is being done. We are locking up 460,00-odd hectares, I think, in this particular RFA. It is not necessary; we do not have to do that. People can still make a living. We can have both. We can manage the forests and those people can work through the forests as well. I really believe that we have missed a great opportunity. I am disappointed that we have to debate this issue today, but I really believe that we should see what we can do.

Time expired.
