



Speech by

JOHN KINGSTON

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

Hansard 5 April 2001

NATURE CONSERVATION [FOREST RESERVES] REGULATION 2000

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—Ind) (5.54 p.m.): I rise to support this dissent motion. I echo the disappointment expressed by the member for Warrego. I compliment the member for Callide on his speech, and I agree with it. I am amazed at what I just heard in two speeches from government members. I think the fact that a decision like this should be made in a democracy makes a mockery of democracy. This is minority politics at its worst. I ask the member for Glass House: has she subjected the opinions that she has received to any statistical analysis?

A government member: Can't you count?

Dr KINGSTON: Yes, I can, and I can do statistics. That is something that the member obviously cannot.

What has been said is an insult to the silviculturists in my electorate who work diligently to preserve the timber on their farms and also produce timber. Over the last 20 years they have doubled the production of timber on a sustainable basis and produced cattle from the same lot of land. In other words, they have achieved multiple land use, and that should be the aim of people in this country.

It is significant that the previous minister did not respond to any invitations to come and visit forestry communities such as mine—communities where a significant proportion of the population rely on forestry projects. It is significant that he did not visit Cooloola or Gympie, the worst area impacted upon by the RFA. Gympie is the only area where the council commissioned an impact study of the intended RFA, and that impact study showed dreadful socioeconomic results to that community. But that report was totally ignored.

I invite both of the previous speakers to come to my electorate. I will drive them out to meet some silviculturists. I will not interfere in their conversation. I challenge them to talk to people who are actually practising silviculture and are improving farming and timber production.

I am astounded to hear that four-wheel-drive groups are now happy that they can drive through state forests. I regularly drive through the state forest. My property is surrounded by state forest. My four-wheel-drive vehicle is protected by two-inch steel bars, which encompass the entire body. It is two years old and very soon it will not have any paint on it. Why? Because the forestry roads are so covered in lantana, groundsel and other weeds. I am astounded to hear that there are no pests in the forests. Every time a south-easter blows, the sky over my property turns white. The white is a cloud of groundsel seed. As a primary producer, I am forced to remove groundsel from my property at my expense or be subjected to a serious fine. However, the government forestry department grows groundsel so successfully that you would think they were cultivating it. They seed my property and all my neighbours' properties every year with more groundsel seed.

I am very disappointed with the way this debate is going and want to be more serious. I express my concern about the confident prediction that adequate plantation timber will be available to meet the requirements of the existing sawmills—those that are left—let alone Queensland or Australia's timber needs. I point out to members in the House how significant the cost of timber imports is to Australia. I ask: can we afford to import more timber? There are very many experienced professional foresters who seriously doubt that Queensland can achieve the optimistic assumptions made under this RFA. One reason I am on the vegetation legislation committee in my region, which stretches from Cooloola to Miriam Vale, is that the professional foresters wanted me on it because I am surrounded by forests.

Why do I and others harbour this doubt? There are many reasons, but let us look at just a few. Firstly, there is the issue of availability and likely cost of adequately sized tracts of suitable land. I know of one company which is actively involved because it made a very serious commitment to establish pine plantations. It is already experiencing great difficulty finding and purchasing significant tracts of land because that land has prices that are already twice its budgeted figure. Secondly, my confidence has been badly shaken by the lack of funding for forestry and natural resource use in this state and, for that matter, in Australia. Some 20 years ago Queensland had a forestry industry department that was world renowned, well staffed, well resourced, well respected and very productive. I acknowledge that there are still excellent people within the Queensland forestry department, but if those fine officers were game to tell the truth they would admit that they are frustrated. One only needs to look at the lack of maintenance of forestry reserves.

I and the graziers who surround my property are constantly plagued by wild pigs, dingoes, groundsel and rat-tail grass. CSIRO had a band of foresters some years ago who were in demand worldwide, but CSIRO's funding has now been cut so severely that its best staff spend a high percentage of their time working overseas to raise funds to maintain their departments. Many of these people are very close friends of mine. In fact, the officer in charge of the tree seed centre in Canberra, Stephen Midgley, is world renowned in his field. To keep his department afloat, he is seriously contemplating spending the next two years working in China on a consulting project. It is a very sad state of affairs when a country and a state neglect research and their natural resources.

I would feel much happier about these 25-year production predictions if the valuable input of the scientists we have in this country was recognised, if they were kept in Australia and if it was not necessary for them to go overseas and work as consultants and give away our valuable technology. I had considerable involvement with a forestry project in Laos funded by the Asian Development Bank. The project was headed by Australian and New Zealand foresters. The seed came from Australia. In fact, it was red river gum, *eucalyptus camaludensis*. The methodologies developed by Australians in South-East Asia worked surprisingly well, but the natural pests of eucalypts do not exist in South-East Asia. There was a similar situation when macadamia nuts were taken to Hawaii. However, these natural pests are indigenous to Queensland. We are making very slow progress, if any, in combating them.

Time expired.
