



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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TIMBER INDUSTRY

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (12.20 a.m.): Last year Queensland celebrated 100 years of forestry. Certainly, the first 80 or 90 years gave us something to celebrate. During this period, forestry made a significant contribution to the economy and development of the state of Queensland, and has been a major source of employment in regional areas. A sensible, professionally devised and scientifically based management system for state forests provided a balance between environmental conservation, watershed protection, timber and honey production, grazing and public recreation. Queensland built up a core of highly skilled forest managers and developed sustainable forest harvesting practices that were recognised internationally as world's best practice. Plantation programs were initiated throughout the state in a responsible endeavour to supplement our natural resources and to provide for our timber needs into the future.

However, the last decade has been a sorry one for the former forestry department, which has been fragmented and sections hived off into other bureaucracies. Large areas of forest that had provided a sustainable supply of milling timber and other products have now been withdrawn from use. The large number of sawlogs harvested from natural forests has continued to decline and there is a similar trend in harvesting timber from natural forests on private land. The expansion of plantations has almost ceased and we are increasingly dependent on imported products.

In October 1997, the Commonwealth and state governments publicised a joint policy grandly named Plantations for Australia, the 2020 vision. Its aim was to treble the area of plantations by the year 2020. Sadly, Queensland is making only a minimal effort to achieve its quota of the national target.

My electorate of Tablelands has been amongst the worst affected areas because of this negative approach to forestry. The sawmilling industry, which contributed so much to the local economy, has been decimated by policies banning timber harvesting from virtually all native forests. We have the land and the climate for timber production, we have technical forestry expertise equal to the best in the world and we have the financial capacity for a major expansion of plantation areas. Why are we not utilising those marvellous assets?

In the five years that DPI Forestry has been a commercialised entity, it has yielded average net returns to Queensland Treasury coffers of some \$18 million a year. Therefore, it is a serious indictment of the Queensland government forestry policy that we remain a net importer of timber. But it is the ultimate in hypocrisy on the part of the government to ban sustainable timber production in so many of our forests while we continue to import timber from unsustainable and environmentally damaging logging operations in the South-East Asian and the Pacific regions.
