



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR NANANGO**

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Hansard 3 December 2002

### **SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT**

**Mrs PRATT** (Nanango—Ind) (12.10 p.m.): An article headed 'Environment minister successful in BBQing koalas', with the subheading 'State development lost as public assets burn' states—

Kilcoy graziers battling a wildfire fanned by strong easterly winds today cursed the Minister for the Environment for removing large areas of native bush from proper management'.

That article was written in response to this government's policy of locking up state forests. As the drought continues, these types of articles will increase as firefighting becomes an almost daily event with an ever-increasing element of danger as the fires become totally uncontrollable.

I rise to speak about the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement and land assessed under that agreement. I refer in particular to the recent designation of land in the Bunya Mountains, which until now has been classified as forest tenure so that cattle producers and beekeepers had access to that area. However, that area is now to be classified by the government as part of the Bunya Mountains National Park. The land in question is at the foothills leading to the Bunyas. The decision to change its designation under the RFA can be described only as a sneaky, land-grabbing exercise. The general feeling in the community and among the members who were appointed to assess the land tenure options for the forest is that the working group was purely a set-up. The government's pledges to consult the community are no more than an exercise to placate the community with no expectation that notice will be taken of those concerns. It is more than obvious that the government's community consultation process is now being used as a blind—and not only in this instance; it is becoming a general trend in relation to many issues that affect communities. I could relate many instances as it appears that the only time that the government really consults and listens to the community is when it has been caught out.

This is a disturbing trend by the Labor government as it formulates legislation by stealth. The Bunya land move is a classic example. At a time when the state is experiencing one of the worst droughts on record, many primary producers need all the help that they can get, not further barriers put in their way. Access to cattle agistment is essential in these dry times for primary producers. Now they have been denied that access.

The government cannot deny the stealthy way in which it has gone about this forest designation. For instance, the Nanango Shire Council and the working group first learned about this decision at its November meeting. A similar situation is now being faced by the Kilcoy Shire Council in regard to the state forest on the Conondale Range, which has traditionally been used by the cattle producers and beekeepers.

When is this government going to learn that, for the little mileage that it gets out of pandering to minority groups, it is destroying not only the livelihoods of producers but also it is affecting the economic contribution that those producers make to the state's economy. When is the government going to learn that as these extra areas are locked up to appease conservationists, they are creating a potential haven for feral animals and allowing the onslaught of lantana and other noxious weeds. Where is the sense in these sorts of decisions?

I have never heard of any greenies going en masse to fight bushfires in areas that have been locked up through their lobbying. That is the case now—with dry weather, the build-up of undergrowth, no forest maintenance, no access roads to many areas and land that is now unable to be managed for sustainable use. Where will the greenies be when noxious weeds such as lantana strangle and decimate the very areas that they are supposedly trying to protect? I can tell members now that they will be in their urban homes watching television as brave SES volunteers risk their lives fighting fires, all because the very land that has supposedly been locked up by the government and the Greens for its protection burns, destroys homes and takes lives. Back-burning is essential. It not only helps to prevent fires but it is also an essential part of good management practice. The Aborigines did it, we have done it for many years, and now this government has stopped it.

Farmers can no longer be held out to be vandals. The modern farmer practises proper land management better than they did at any other time in our history. On the other hand, this government has been cited as conducting mismanagement of forests through neglect. This is another, more devastating, form of vandalism. The RFA was supposed to be set up for farmers to use as a model for their land management for the next 25 years. But the government appears have gone back on its word. What is happening now is apparently not what the graziers and beekeepers were informed would happen at the inception of the RFA. The very people who have a real knowledge and interest in proper forest management have virtually been excluded. This and the next generation will pay for the government's blinkered approach to the problem.

Sadly, the proof of what I am saying can be attested to in part by the current tragic bushfires that have occurred in New South Wales—another Labor state that pandered to the green vote, and which is now paying the price through the devastating loss of flora and fauna as well as losses to its communities. This government has failed to get the budget right and we have gone deeper into deficit. It failed and continues to fail the health system, which is collapsing and continues to fail in all manner of issues, because it fails to conduct proper consultation with the community groups that understand the issues. This government will go down in history as the vandal that destroyed this once great state.