



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Thursday, 20 April 2006

FORESTRY PLANTATIONS QUEENSLAND BILL

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (4.53 pm): The Forestry Plantations Queensland Bill 2006 covers two broad areas or issues, as stated in the parliamentary explanatory notes. Firstly, legislation is required to establish the statutory position of the chief plantation forestry officer to create a corporation and confer property rights onto that corporation. Secondly, amendment of the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 is required to change salary sacrifice arrangements for members of parliament and to clarify salary entitlements of members holding certain offices. It is to the first issue, the commercial management of the state owned plantation assets, that I will direct my comments.

I note that in respect of consistency with fundamental legislative principles six clauses in this bill may be regarded by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee as an inappropriate delegation of legislative power, otherwise known as the Henry VIII clause. From my understanding of the Henry VIII clause, it is a clause that allows a government regulation to change an act. So fundamentally the public scrutiny and accountability of the government of the day's decision-making process is decreased. As a broad principle this is not a good thing, and I will be very interested to hear the minister's comments in relation to the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's assessment.

I note that in the recent Scrutiny of Legislation Committee *Alert Digest* of 19 April clause 38 of this bill exempts the operations of Forestry Plantations Queensland, or FPQ, from the provisions of the Ombudsman Act 2001. The committee states in relation to clause 38 'the question of whether, in the circumstances, this lessening of the generally available rights of citizens to seek investigation and review of government decisions was appropriate.' I have read the minister's reply, but essentially her logic says that because we are commercialising state forestry plantations in Queensland we need less public scrutiny. I would have thought that the reverse logic would have applied—we need more public scrutiny. Remember that this is commercialisation, not privatisation. This means that public moneys will still be used.

My office has been in contact with the CEO of Timber Queensland, Rod McInnes. Timber Queensland, as the peak industry body, is funded by the forest and timber industries and represents most segments of the industry—including sawmills, loggers, treaters, fabricators and wholesalers. A key role of Timber Queensland is to support and encourage the development and expansion of the forestry industry as a means of securing the long-term business viability of its members. Mr McInnes would like to see the ongoing activity observed closely to make sure it works properly. In principle, he thinks the 'concept is a good thing' but the 'proof of the pudding will be in the eating'. Although he believes that the bill is a good thing, he has not seen the final form. Mr McInnes believes that it takes away departmental structural issues that have made certain things difficult in the past. Mr McInnes says that Timber Queensland will not have the bureaucracy to deal with as it did in the past. I sense from that there will be a streamlining of bureaucracy. Mr McInnes says that it will be far more commercially viable and commercially directed than in the past and that it has the potential to be efficient economically but Timber Queensland is 'a bit nervous about how it will be delivered' and it will be keen to keep the pressure on the government to ensure that it goes according to plan.

My office recently spoke to Dr Aila Keto, the President of the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society. Dr Aila Keto said that the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society is very supportive of the plantation industry and very supportive of making the plantation industry stronger and economical but, at the same time, socially acceptable and environmentally sound. Dr Aila Keto believes it will be a move for the better and will be of great benefit to the dynamic industry as long as the oversight management is still transparent. It would be interesting to question Dr Keto on the move by the government to stop the ombudsperson being able to inquire into this organisation. Dr Aila Keto also hopes that it will be monitored. It has been a long process over many years of discussion on the best way to go about this. She believes that it has been evaluated pretty broadly to ensure that it is economically, socially and environmentally friendly—that triple bottom line. She believes that it is a smart industry where economic planning is crucial to the success of the industry.

Many different groups are affected by the forestry plantations legislation. One of those is the horse-riding fraternity. I will share with members some correspondence that I have received from Anne Barlow from the Queensland Endurance Riders Association. She is a state committee member. Anne has written to me stating—

As concerned horse riders we would like a lot more information regarding the bill to be introduced into Parliament this week namely the Forest Plantations Bill 2006.

To date whenever answers have been sought by horse riders regarding the likely impact of this on our riding access we have not received an answer.

In fact at Kawana Community Parliament last year, Premier Beattie completely side stepped answering our question on whether this was likely to happen, muttering something about a pile of paper in the corner of his office that he could not even jump over.

We have not been consulted at all on the issue and there are many questions being raised by concerned riders at the moment, such as:

As it is we operate under a permit system from the EPA (QP&WS), what will the privatisation—

she has actually written 'privatisation' instead of 'corporatisation'—

of the pine plantation forests mean for us?

Will we be dealing with a third party?

A corporate entity?

How will this work for access and what will be required?

Will we be required to supply insurance details to gain riding access?

Riders are dependent on safe riding access in the plantation areas, especially since the native areas are to be taken away and protected into national park tenure.

I would appreciate some of these matters being brought to the attention of the parliament if you are able.

Many thanks,

Anne Barlow

I trust that in her reply the minister will address Mrs Barlow's concerns and the concerns of horse riders. When it comes to horse riding in state forests, this government has not used much common sense.

A recent media article described some of the silliness that this Labor government has carried on with. An article by Melanie Pilling, entitled 'Revised horse trails described as accident waiting to happen', states—

Gold Coast riders say it won't be long until someone is seriously hurt, describing the State Government's revised horse trails as 'impossibly dangerous'.

They say the new trails threaten the future of the \$67 million industry and the Gold Coast's long horse heritage.

Earlier this year, riders were locked out of forests while a government-appointed consultant found alternative routes for them to ride.

The lock-out, prompted by the Government's decision to convert 150,000ha of state forest into national park, outraged the horseriding community.

Queensland President of the Gold Coast-based Australian Horse Riders Association Graeme Sleeman said the latest announcement was 'madness'. He said the trails were designed without consultation with the 6300-strong Gold Coast riding community and were 'illogical'.

'We can't believe how ad hoc the trail designs are and how dangerous they are for horse, rider and road users,' he said.

'There are some shocking spots along the Beaudesert-Canungra and Maudsland roads and on the Albert River Bridge where horses, cars and heavy vehicles share the roadway.

'They didn't even consult us.

'Horses and cars don't mix.

'It is only going to be a matter of time before someone gets hurt, someone who doesn't know their horse and doesn't know what can scare it.'

Mr Sleeman said another concern was for riders who relied on horses to earn a living.

'It is a serious threat to the \$6.4 billion Australian industry,' he said.

'The Gold Coast has the largest per capita horse ownership in Australia—four times the national average—and the horse industry is worth a staggering \$67 million a year to the Gold Coast.

'Horse riding is our heritage. I mean, if someone said we are going to stop playing rugby league there would be total uproar.'

Mr Sleeman said the old trails riders used through state forests were existing trails used by rural firefighters and caused no damage.

'We would go out riding on the fire trails and come back and tell the rural firefighters whether the trails were littered with debris or fallen trees that would hinder firefighting efforts,' he said.

I have met with many horse riders and I have a brother who is a farrier. They are some of the most environmentally aware people in this country. They are environmentalists in the true sense of the word. They enjoy being outdoors. They enjoy being in the space of our horse-riding trails in our state forests. They love simple things such as being able to breathe clean air and having time to think and get rid of all the stresses that life builds up.

Horse riding is a great activity for our young folk. In this day and age, we hear the horrific statistics of youth suicide and all of the other problems associated with growing up in this ever-changing society. Horse riding is a wholesome activity that is great for our children. We do not want to limit our children's opportunities to go horse riding, and that includes everyone. You do not have to grow up in the bush to enjoy horse riding. There are plenty of kids in the city who ride horses.

I wish to touch on the issue of pest and weed management. I am concerned about protecting the biodiversity of Queensland's native flora and fauna. State forestry plantations have become breeding grounds for feral animals and noxious plants and weeds. They cause millions of dollars of damage to the environment. I do not think any studies into this have been conducted, so I say 'millions'. It could quite possibly be billions, depending on how it is costed.

Recently, I spoke to members of the Wilderness Society who estimate that there are approximately five million feral pigs in Queensland's Cape York district. The size of the problem with feral pigs alone beggars belief. There are millions of feral pigs in state forests. I want to know what the minister and the government will do about that. Will the CEO of Forestry Plantations Queensland have a plan to rid the plantations of feral pests and weeds?

I will briefly comment on the talk of closing the cypress forests. I find it incomprehensible that this government is thinking of locking up cypress pine forests. Do the Premier or other members of the Labor Party think that individual trees cry out in pain when they are cut down? Do they think that the trees have a consciousness that is almost the same as humans and other living beings?

Cypress pine is one of the most wonderful building materials. I built my house out of it. I have my fingers crossed, but they say that it is impervious to attack by white ants. One of the great things about cypress to build a house is that, by putting the house on stumps and using cypress floorboards and walls, there is automatic strength against high wind or cyclones. It is stronger than brick in its sideways movement. Also, it is environmentally friendly in that you do not have to air-condition your home. You can design a home of cypress pine with plenty of flow-through ventilation. If you situate the house with the right aspect, you do not have to worry about spending lots of money and creating the resultant CO2 gases.

Many people now use the 'esky' approach to house building—insulate and air-condition. We need to open up our thinking—think about where we live and construct our houses to match the environment. I urge all Queenslanders to think about the 'tent' approach to houses building. It allows plenty of flow-through ventilation, it is easy on the electricity account and, of course, it is much more environmentally friendly.

Before I close, I will comment on the amendment to the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001 to change salary sacrifice arrangements for members of parliament and to clarify the salary entitlements of members who hold certain offices. When you go to a party and you want to stop the conversation mid-sentence, talk about politicians and how much they earn. A general perception exists that members of this place are paid too much. I make the observation that many of my constituents remarked to me during the time of the royal commission and Patel inquiry that they would love to have Commissioner Tony Morris in this place, representing them. They did not care which side of politics he would be on—Labor or Liberal. They just wanted a man with that integrity, character, wit and intelligence. They all said that he would make a great member of parliament. I replied, 'Why would Tony Morris want to come into this House and take'—I am making an estimate now—a 1,000 per cent pay cut?' I merely make that point.

How many times have we seen a bright, shiny new Labor Party plan which looks great on paper but in practice runs like a two-bob watch? In closing, I echo the words of the CEO of Timber Queensland, Rod McInnes: this legislation has the potential to be efficient economically, but they are 'a bit nervous about how it will be delivered' and they will be keen to keep the pressure on the government to ensure it goes according to plan.