



Speech by

Stuart Copeland

MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

Hansard Thursday, 20 April 2006

FORESTRY PLANTATIONS QUEENSLAND BILL

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (4.26 pm): Madam Deputy Speaker Barry, it is great to see you in the chair. You have our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

The shadow minister, the member for Toowoomba South, has covered in detail the opposition's response to the Forestry Plantations Queensland Bill 2006. He covered a whole range of areas and I do not want to go through all those again. However, I will refer to some specific areas.

There has been a lot of uncertainty in the forestry industry in Queensland—there is no doubt about that—particularly over the time of this Beattie Labor government. There have been significant changes. I have to say that not all of those changes have been for the good—certainly not for the economic good—of the industry. It is an industry that has been filled with uncertainty. It has been very difficult for organisations and companies to survive. More importantly, it has been very difficult for them to plan for the future because they simply have not known what is going to happen in the future, what investment they could reliably put in and what stock or product is available to them.

The western hardwoods decision has been surrounded by controversy, particularly because of the very long lead time that is required to establish hardwood plantations. As the shadow minister said, if the product was there it would be being used now. However, there is a very long lead time before those plantations become economically viable, to sustain an economically viable milling industry. The announcement this morning by the Deputy Premier regarding the buyout and the closure of timber mills in places like Monto is absolutely appalling. It is an absolute indictment on this government. It will be devastating for a town like Monto to lose that number of jobs—and I know Monto well.

The western hardwoods decision has also created a whole lot of uncertainty for the cypress pine industry. That is probably my particular area of interest because there is a significant cypress pine industry in my electorate. I know firsthand how successful that industry has been, how successful it can be and what a contribution it makes not only to our local economy but also to the state and even the Australian economies.

Timber Queensland Ltd commissioned a cypress industry preliminary socioeconomic survey which was compiled by KPMG in March 2006. It gives us some very useful information on just how important that industry is to Queensland and how important it is that that industry has access to logs in state owned forests. For example, one of the figures quoted is that in 2004-05, 84 per cent of log inputs for respondents—and that is respondents to the survey included in this document—came from state owned forests with the remaining 15 per cent coming from private forests. A huge proportion is coming from state owned forests. In comparison, the five-year average log input from state forests was 88 per cent versus 12 per cent from private forests.

In my electorate the Millmerran shire and the township of Cecil Plains have four mills that were covered by this report. The western part of my electorate, the Millmerran shire, has significant areas of state forest and significant reserves of cypress pine. I have spoken extensively and on numerous occasions in the parliament about how important the cypress pine industry is, how sustainable it is and how we need to have an announcement from the government to ensure certainty of access to that product

for millers in those communities. It would be absolutely crazy to cut down access for the cypress pine industry. It is one of the most sustainable timbers that we will ever see.

I know that the minister for the environment, when speaking on an environment bill, said that she had visited Injune. Similar circumstances as those in Cecil Plains surround the township of Injune and the cypress industry around Injune. It is a timber that grows very quickly and very densely. It is a timber that can be easily milled. It has unique properties. I think it is a very attractive timber for flooring. That certainly has been the experience of the millers in my electorate. They have really diversified and value added. They are exporting significant quantities of timber for flooring to Japan, Asia, North America and South America. They are exporting it in pallet loads so that it can go up in the lifts in the high-rises in New York. It is a very attractive timber. As the shadow minister said, it is termite resistant. Given the reduction in the sorts of treatments available for termites in the building process, it is even more important that the cypress industry is allowed to develop what is a very strong market.

The report compiled by KPMG details the numbers of people employed in the industry in a whole range of areas. I will mention only two areas in my electorate that are directly affected. One is Toowoomba city, where there are 92 direct employees in the cypress industry. They work in one mill. More significantly is that in the Millmerran shire, in the towns of Millmerran and Cecil Plains, there are 46 direct employees, 13 contractors and four mills. That is a very significant economic driver of those communities, particularly in Cecil Plains. We need to make sure that the people who are running those mills have certainty for their industry and can continue to invest, continue to expand the sorts of products that they are able to mill and continue to be able to earn export income for Australia. If so, they will be able to continue to employ people.

They are the direct numbers of employees. If we were take such a substantial number of jobs out of a place like Cecil Plains then the indirect losses would be great as well. That is what the announcement about Monto this morning brings home to me. The effect on that community is going to be horrendous. I know the effect it would have on a community like Cecil Plains, which is in my electorate.

I think it is such a shame that this government has not had the confidence in the industry to help support it. The former minister for primary industries boasted about it having world's best practice in terms of forestry management. That is what we have. We have world's best practice across all of the different types of timbers that we manage in both plantations and native forest. Yet we are closing down more and more of that industry while the demand remains. While the demand remains, the only thing we can do is import those timbers—import them from places that do not have the same sort of management practices that we do and that do not have the same sort of environmental credentials that we have in our forestry industry. We are willing to sacrifice our jobs and our economy on the basis of good environmental credentials. It does not add up. It is a stupid way to go when we quite rightly have been recognised as the world's best when it comes to these industries.

The value of this industry to Queensland is noted in this report. One of the other statistics highlighted in the KPMG report is the value-added sales. I think this is important. We need to look at the value-added sales. That really is of great economic benefit to the state. The value-added sales accounted for 59 per cent of total sales—that is a significant amount—of the respondent mills in 2004-05. Export markets accounted for 40 per cent. That is direct export income that is being earned by these millers from Queensland. A further 35 per cent went interstate, 15 per cent to south-east Queensland, nine per cent to regional Queensland and the remaining one per cent of revenue was generated for central and north Queensland.

This is a very important industry. It has been operating under a cloud for a long time. We need to support it because it is such a good industry. I urge anyone who has not seen what a cypress forest is like and what cypress timber is like to have a look, because the government will be making decisions about the future of the cypress industry and many members will not have any idea what sort of timber it is. I think that would be travesty.

Mr Malone: It grows like a pest.

Mr COPELAND: It does grow like a pest. I have said previously that I was talking to a very senior member of the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water and we were discussing the fact that we probably should classify this timber as a noxious weed because it almost is. It grows that quickly. I will not name that person because it probably would be a bit embarrassing for him. It is an important industry to my electorate. I certainly will do everything I can to try to support the continuation of it.

I visited the Cecil Plains High School earlier this year to talk to the year 10 class about politics and how politicians do things that relate to their everyday lives. We were discussing the sorts of issues that we were dealing with in parliament such as driver's licences, schools and those sorts of things. I said that one of the important things that we talk about for this area is the future of the cypress pine industry. Two of the families of the students in that admittedly very small class are directly employed in the cypress industry. Take those families out of that town, close that industry down and we would close down the high school

and make the primary school struggle. That high school is struggling to get enough numbers as it is to remain open to year 10.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr COPELAND: It is scaring school kids. School kids are worried about this because they know the uncertainty that is facing their families. They know the uncertainty surrounding their parents' jobs because they work in the cypress mill in town. They do not know how long those jobs are going to remain there. That is just a silly comment from the member for Southport. It is something that school students are concerned about because it is something that affects their everyday lives, affects their community and directly affects their school.

One of the other issues that the shadow minister examined in detail was the recreational use of forests. We have seen time and time again that this government simply does not care about those recreational users, whether it is horse riders or beekeepers. We have had the debate over and over again. I hope that those people who do want to use state forests for recreational purposes remember that there is only one side of this chamber that will support their access, no matter what sorts of platitudes are given by various ministers of this government.

The other area that is tacked on at the end of this bill relates to superannuation for parliamentarians. The member for Thuringowa mentioned it as well. It is an area that is going to be challenging given the changes that have happened in parliaments right around Australia. I think all states have enacted the same legislation regarding superannuation. Politicians are always going to get criticised no matter what money is paid. A real challenge is going to emerge in attracting into parliament people who would otherwise earn significantly higher amounts outside of parliament. I think that is something that will challenge parliaments right around the country. It not going to be easy to address. There is a perception out there, and it is only a perception, that politicians are paid too much. As members on all sides of this chamber know, that is simply not the case. The shadow minister has covered in detail the opposition's stance on this bill. I urge the government to do everything it can to support the continuation of the cypress pine industry. In fact, I think the industry can be expanded once that certainty is provided.