



Speech by

Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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FORESTRY PLANTATIONS QUEENSLAND

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (11.46 am): Yesterday during question time we witnessed two rather inept and insensitive performances by the Treasurer and the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland. Their performances were inept because the minister had to correct himself on the details of the guarantee that his own government has negotiated with the staff of Forestry Plantations Queensland and insensitive because both ministers mocked and made light of the very serious concerns of the staff who are currently employed by FPQ.

The staff of FPQ do not expect much. This government has made sure that, when it comes to expectations, the bar has been set abysmally low. They only ask for a little respect and some transparency when it comes to their position before, during and after the sale. It is not, as the Treasurer would have us believe, the potential bidders who are swinging the axe at FPQ; it is the Bligh Labor government, and the staff at FPQ know it. They also know that, although the Minister for Transport can give Queensland Rail employees a guarantee that not one of them will be forced to relocate from their community, the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland refuses to give the same guarantee for FPQ staff. Where does that leave the tireless workers in the workshops, nurseries and road gangs of FPQ? No better off than where they currently believe themselves to be: cast aside, gagged, the guinea pigs of this government's assets fire sale.

The minister might think that because most of the forestry operations are located in the south-east corner that gives some certainty to the FPQ staff. Let me explain it to the minister carefully: there is a big difference between Beerburrum and Toolara. The two locations are some 150 kilometres apart. For staff and their families, that means relocating homes, relocating schools, saying goodbye to friends and even family themselves. No wonder FPQ staff are departing in droves. Up to 50 per cent of some teams have accepted the VERs. The uncertainty is simply too great. The workshops are operating on skeleton crews, road gangs have been decimated and even management is walking out the door—all because this government in its drive to divest itself of our timber assets has failed to treat with care and respect its No. 1 asset, its people.