

NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (COMMERCIAL FORESTS) AMDMT BILL

29 September 2011

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from 27 July 2011.)

Mr PEDERICK: Clause 5 relates to the preparation of water allocation plans. I note that the draft Lower Limestone Coast Water Allocation Plan has almost been in limbo for five or six years, and what concerns me is whether you and your department have it in limbo on a supposition that forestry is going to be noted as a water user under this legislation before that moves forward. It has been so long now, and I think it is quite out of order if that is the supposition that the department has been making, that is, of legislation passing through both houses in this place.

The Hon. P. CAICA: I thank the honourable member for his question and, of course, it does seem like it has been in limbo for a period of time and, quite simply, there is a water allocation plan in place. That water allocation plan has been, quite rightly, subject to review, and that is what happens to water allocation plans. The information that I have received, and that my predecessors have received—and it is something that has been on the boil, as the member for MacKillop said, for over 10 years—is what activity in the form of forestry should be in place to account for its water use?

In answer to your question, it is quite simple—that we were not going to implement another water allocation plan without forestry or, more importantly, without the tools being available for the NRM Board to include forestry as a water intercepting activity. I presume you would recall that when I was the forestry minister this was being discussed back in the previous term of this government. Now I have the role of water minister and we are progressing it to include, at least on this occasion, the tools for forestry to be regarded as a water interception activity and for its activity to be allocated in the context of the water allocation plan—so, yes.

Mr PEDERICK: In the light of that answer, minister, is it not a little arrogant of your department to think that this bill will pass and become an act when it is not even in legislation, yet they are holding up the relevant water allocation plan thinking that this legislation will proceed when it may well not?

The Hon. P. CAICA: I am not going to be rude to the member for Hammond, but you would realise, because I am sure you are not stupid, that there is an interim water allocation plan in place. Quite simply, it does include forestry, and the information that I have received from many within the South-East was that a tool to allow forestry to be included in a water allocation plan should be an objective.

It has been an objective of this government since 2002 when we were elected, and we are fulfilling that policy position and the commitment that I believe we have made to many people within the South-East in regard to forestry as an activity. In my view, and I know that the member for MacKillop and others might not agree with it, but I think this provides a greater security through all water users in the South-East by including forestry as a water intercepting activity and allocating it as such.

Mr PEDERICK: Thank you, minister, for that answer. In my mind, if the legislation gets chucked out of the parliament, so to speak, and does not proceed, we could be here for another five years rolling over past more and more times of the five-yearly review times because of this policy, this supposition. I think it is absurd, and I think it is arrogant to believe that this is already part of the plan when it is not. It is obviously what the department is planning for, and it has not even passed legislation. You have answered that question; I am just making the point.