

Mr WILSON (Monmouth) - Mr President, the comments made earlier this afternoon make me wonder who is really running this State - whether it is this Parliament, whether it is large industries in this State, or whether in fact the Japanese are calling the tune.

The subject before us relates to an express concern by honourable members of this Council for the future of the forest industry. I rise to my feet on this my first occasion as a member of your honourable Council, Mr President, not because I am concerned that the Forestry Commission is not managing the Crown resources adequately - I do not believe an inquiry at this time should be in the form of a witch-hunt - but because I share the genuine concern of many other honourable members of this House for the future of the forestry industry in Tasmania. I have given this matter careful consideration and I will support the honourable member for Tamar's motion as I believe there have been developments in this industry since your Council's report of 1972 which could be reviewed so that this honourable Council can remain well informed on this industry so vital to the State.

Mr President, before I continue with some of my thoughts on the industry may I, with your approval, take this opportunity to make a few general comments.

Mr PRESIDENT - As long as they are relevant to the motion.

Mr WILSON - It is with some pride, Mr President, that I take a seat in this House representing the Division of Monmouth - and, as you are well aware, Monmouth is an area with a very active forest industry - knowing that it is an electorate which has been well served by capable and respected members during my lifetime. I refer, of course, to the late Mr Geoff Green and to my predecessor, Mr Louis Bisdee. I believe Mr Bisdee can retire from politics knowing that he has served his electorate well. He was respected and admired by his constituents throughout his 22-year term. The late Mr Geoff Green, of course, attained the high honour of President of this House, the high honour that you yourself, Mr President, now hold; and I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election to that honoured position.

However this electorate of Monmouth has changed quite considerably during the last six years and I think it is important to note that the timber industry we are now talking about has been part of that significant change. Many more young families now live in Monmouth and it is these young families who, I believe anyway, influenced the result of the recent poll in which I took part. During the month leading up to the election I met many people throughout the electorate and I feel I can commence my term in this House with confidence, knowing that I visited more than 5 000 homes throughout that electorate, and I can appreciate what really matters to many of those people and what they understand as important things in their lives. I take this opportunity, therefore, to thank the people of Monmouth for their support and the confidence they have shown in me. I pledge to them that I will do my best during my term or terms in this Council.

Mr President, on this first occasion I cannot miss the opportunity to comment on what I believe is the role of your Council. I have no doubt that this House of the State Parliament should be an independent house and a house of review and I think this should well be borne out in the motion before us at the present moment. What we are in effect trying to do is to inquire into an industry in order to review its progress over the last 12 years and, I believe, to look into the future of that industry. However, although it is undemocratic to prevent any political party from fielding candidates - and I certainly do not advocate that this should happen - it is becoming increasingly difficult for independent candidates to match the concentrated efforts of a party machine. For four months prior to the election in May I tried to do that. What is encouraging is the clear indication of what the electors of Tasmania want and that independent members are still in the majority in this House. It is my belief that the people of Tasmania clearly endorse the role this House has in the government of this State.

We are fortunate, I believe, to be part of a parliamentary system which is one of the best, if not the best, in the world. This of course includes the Hare-Clark system which is unique to this State and the recent improvement in the form of the Robson amendment, involving rotating positions on ballot papers.

I offered myself to the electorate as an alternative because I wanted to be part of a process which makes Tasmania, particularly south-eastern Tasmania, still one of the greatest places in which to live - in Australia and perhaps, on reflection, in the world. I felt I had this responsibility, Mr President, for I feel proudly patriotic to be an Australian.

We, as representatives of the people, can ill afford to allow this State to sink economically. Although I have just heard comments by the honourable Leader to suggest that our action in supporting this inquiry into the forest industry may well do that, I fail to see how a constructive inquiry into the forest industry could possibly deter negotiations for the future if those negotiations are in the best interests of this State.

I now direct my attention quite specifically to the subject before this Council. There is no doubt that this forest industry is a key industry for the State. It has been a prominent interest historically and I believe it needs to be nurtured. It is interesting that the Forestry Commission symbol is one of nurturing. I believe forestry needs to remain one of the State's life-blood industries. It is vital to my electorate that the industry prospers because the forestry industries are the largest single employer in Monmouth. To do this I think we must continually reassess the industry, the techniques being used in it and the results being achieved. A close monitoring of the industry is a responsible approach for this Council.

I would like to comment briefly on a number of specific aspects of the industry. It is appropriate to commence with the sawmilling industry which has always been prominent in the south-east of the State. Historically many families have been involved in sawmilling, either directly or indirectly.

Small sawmills throughout my electorate are still significant employers. But that is being threatened by problems in the distribution of available saw-logs. It is becoming increasingly difficult for small sawmills to obtain saw-logs and even optional logs from Crown land. These small mills currently have little or no access to Crown forest logs and because of that are being forced out of the industry. This is simply because of a decline in the quantity of suitable saw-log timber available on private land.

It is appropriate to refer to the figures in the Forestry Commission's 1979-80 annual report where the number of logs available from Crown land increased from 709 000 cubic metres in 1977-78 to 809 000 cubic metres. That is quite a significant increase in the two-year period, whereas on private land there was a significant reduction in the quantity of saw-logs available - from 197 000 cubic metres down to 131 000 cubic metres. Although the total number of saw-logs available from forestry areas throughout the State increased in the two-year period it is quite significant that the number of logs available from private land declined. That is a problem to which we must apply ourselves during this inquiry and I understand the terms of reference we now have would cover that. It is of vital importance to the small sawmilling industries that they have access to resources.

I now wish to refer to the woodchip industry which is really the larger slice of the forestry industry in this State. I have already mentioned briefly the significance which this industry has to my electorate. The woodchip factory based at Triabunna has in its time been a significant employer in my electorate as I mentioned earlier. The employment of people on site at the factory and the noticeable development of the townships of Triabunna and Orford can be directly related to the siting of that industry on the east coast.

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Construction of many forest roads throughout the south-eastern corner of Tasmania can be directly attributed to the TFPH presence on the east coast. What has been most noticeable is the growth in small businesses and small industries because of the major industry in that area. I guess the same applies to the woodchip industry based on the Tamar River in the north, on the north-west coast and in the north-east of the State.

There has been a great advent of small businesses such as the truck haulage business. The number of trucks now on the road is quite significant. Numbers of people who prior to the woodchip industry coming to this State were employees now have the opportunity to be employers or at least to have their own small businesses. The woodchip industry has been the reason for this taking place.

There is a number of other small businesses, too, in felling and snigging and the light industrial areas and it is these light industrial areas which -

Sitting suspended from 6 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.

Mr WILSON (Monmouth) - Mr President, before the suspension I was discussing the woodchip industry and mentioned the importance of the employment which that industry has created throughout the State, particularly in the area which I am familiar with and which I represent in this House. I also mentioned the contribution the industry has made to the construction of forest roads throughout certain areas of the State, such as the north-west, as the honourable member for Russell mentioned earlier in the debate. That also applies to the east coast where considerable construction of forest roads has taken place, and that of course has employed many people and left the State with a considerable asset. We would not have had the asset, Mr President, if it had not have been for the advent of the woodchip industry in the State.

I mentioned the contribution small businesses are now making in the State. These have developed because of the woodchip industry. It has helped many ordinary people to rise from the ranks of employee to those of the small employer or alternatively self-employed men. I briefly mentioned the heavy haulage industry and the felling and snigging that is associated with logging. I was discussing the light industry which has sprung up right around the State, based on developing small areas within the woodchip industry.

I feel for the people in these small industries because I believe they are making a significant contribution to the State. I refer particularly to light engineering firms and firms which have been established to repair heavy haulage and log equipment, trucks, and chain saws. The thing that has been very noticeable to me, Mr President, is that within these small businesses we have a growing group of people who are making significant contributions in the area of development and the design of more efficient equipment. This is one of the areas which I believe requires considerable assistance and incentives for those people to continue the good work which they started through necessity; to provide them with a means of constructing and developing mechanical equipment which can be utilised in the woodchip industry, with the possibilities of marketing those improvements and developments outside this State. I believe this is very important.

I know several of these small businesses are currently worked on new development areas such as triaxle log trailers. The first two or three have been constructed by light engineering firms in this State. There is considerable potential to sell those sorts of developments outside the State. Pole-breakers and other small projects within the truck haulage business are being developed by other light engineering firms and this is also making a significant contribution. The reason for that, Mr President, is that most of the heavy equipment being used in the timber industry in this State is imported from either Europe or North America and, as such, has been developed for specific purposes which are different from those required by our hardwood industry here and consequently significant modifications need to be made. In some cases some of the pieces of equipment even have to be remade.

What is missing in this area at present is some incentive for these small firms. There is no assistance and virtually no recognition for the work they are doing, so they carry the whole can themselves. If they undertake any development at all they finance it themselves; they rely on some contractor purchasing the idea and then wait until it sells itself. I believe the type of assistance governments can give need not be terribly expensive but it does need to be creative to give businesses the incentive to develop and modify and, given the opportunity, to enter other markets.

The chip industry has also brought with it considerable stimulation in the area of equipment sales. This has flowed through a number of sectors of industry. It has been very noticeable in the retail industry where sales of equipment have been stimulated considerably. Any loss within the industry or any downturns in production are severely felt by the equipment sales sector. As far as my electorate is concerned, I guess the most encouraging thing the woodchip industry has done has been in revitalising sections of the east coast and southern midlands communities which were previously based on small farming. As all honourable members will be well aware small farming in this day and age yields very small profits, if any. I can think of a number of communities within the area the honourable member for Macquarie now has - Levendale, Woodsdale and Tunnack - and within my area - Buckland, Triabunna, Orford and right up to Bicheno - which have been revitalised because of the employment now being provided by the woodchip industry.

But the most important contribution the woodchip industry has made to this State - and I sincerely believe this - is in the efficient use of the forest resource. Among our terms of reference for this inquiry we are looking at increasing the efficiency of the use of this resource and that has already been mentioned earlier in this debate. I firmly believe the best method of forest management is the clear felling of our hardwood forests, particularly where those forests are of dry sclerophyll type, because the selective saw logging process employed historically has significantly reduced the quality of these forests. The best way of putting a forest back is to clear it off and start cropping, and that is what the woodchip industry is doing, Mr President. It is a cropping process now, not a selective logging process where the best stems and the best examples of any particular timber species have been taken from the forest. With that comes a number of important developments. One of those developments is in the field of regeneration, which is one of the major topics this inquiry will be looking at.

I think it may be interesting at this stage to make some comment on the total area of State forests. We are talking about 3.75 million acres or 1.5 million hectares, and that is a very large area to be covered with forest. Of that 1.5 million hectares, about 1.3 million-odd hectares is productive forest. Only a small proportion of that is fringe forest, which is retained as a buffer zone.

The regeneration process in this State has undergone quite a few developments over the last 10 or 12 years since the chip industry started. What is now noticeable is the area of State forest regenerated each year. This involves something of the order of 8 500 hectares a year with only a very small proportion - from the 1979-80 Forestry Commission Report of 49 hectares - being planted. So a significant area of forest - 8 500 hectares - has been regenerated. Quite a bit of work is done by the commission and quite a few risks are taken, I might add, in ensuring that the regeneration process is kept up. I believe one of the important roles for an inquiry such as this is to evaluate what has happened over those 10 or 11 years since that regeneration process has started.

Mr Coates - Hear, hear.

Mr WILSON - Comments have been made from time to time in the media concerning the effectiveness of that regeneration. I believe, Mr President, that your Council can make some evaluation of the effectiveness of that regeneration, the areas involved in the overall regeneration program so far and what percentage of those areas may be adequately stocked. And I would suggest that that would be an extremely high percentage.

We are relying on the expertise within the commission and I personally have tremendous faith in the commission's ability to anticipate some of the problems which that regeneration process might encounter. Unsuitable seasons are a real challenge to commission staff in this regeneration process. Forestry officers have to select the right days to burn and burning is a very critical part of the process. There have been many new developments in this burning area. The commission also has to guard against insect attack and it is very noticeable in the last six or seven years that it has employed a full-time entomologist to ensure that that area is closely monitored.

The area which concerns me is that of wildfire. Our chances of seeing a regeneration reach maturity depends entirely upon the effectiveness of the fire control authorities in this State. And here I am predominantly referring to the commission which is responsible for wildfire protection of State forests and forested areas. I can appreciate that a serious wildfire situation on the east coast would not only be detrimental to the long-term interests of the forest industry but it would also wipe out considerable areas of regeneration. I hope the committee of inquiry applies itself to that problem, Mr President, because I believe it must be continually monitored. We must study the resources made available to the authorities who are responsible for this area to ensure that this does not happen. If major wildfires go through our forest areas we will have to start that cycle again. And if that occurs it will certainly upset the economy of the woodchip industry.

Other areas which need to be looked at in terms of regeneration include nutrition. A lesser problem is erosion until the early establishment stage which the committee of 1971 applied itself to. But I would like to enlarge on this subject of burning.

I have already intimated how concerned I am about that possibility. I hope the possibility of a very serious summer season with wildfires which could wipe out vast areas of regeneration is remote. The committee should apply itself to looking at the provision of equipment and the allocation of funds in these areas because we must take all possible precautions.

There have been many new developments in the commission's burning program and one of these new developments is of prime interest. I refer specifically to the introduction of aerial ignition which is a recent introduction to its program. My understanding from the 1979-80 report from the commission is that 15 000 hectares of this State have been aerially ignited. The commission staff has been instrumental in developing this process to its present stage. I personally believe that should be assessed as part of the regeneration process because burning is part of regeneration.

It should also be assessed in terms of its value in protecting forested areas, particularly regeneration areas, from wildfire. I am aware that in recent times the commission has adopted a procedure of aerially burning large areas adjacent to State forest, particularly on dry sclerophyll areas, and including private land within those burnt areas. I hope this practice continues. I believe it is important for this House to be aware that this is happening and of the value of that process.

I also believe the Forestry Commission has played a major part in educating other State authorities and private people in the techniques available to best use fire as an aid to management. That is a very important role and even at this stage I would like to see the Government give consideration to an injection of funds specifically for this purpose. I believe the Forestry Commission has the expertise to be one of the best - if not the best - authorities in the State for educating other instrumentalities and private people on the best use of fire.

I mentioned earlier that one of the advantages of the woodchip industry is that it is a clear-felling operation, and I suggested that improved forest genetics was a part of this process. With selected logging one takes out the best examples of any species - the best logs - because they are the ones from which the most money can be made and in the long term the quality and the standard must decline. In the long term interest of the State I believe we must apply ourselves to the value of provenance trials and

research into the best genetic strains of particular species of eucalypts. I realise that is a fairly specialised area but in this State at present we have at least one trial on one of those species, the stringy bark or the eucalyptus obliqua species, which is a joint trial with, I believe, the Forest Research Institute.

I believe that area is important. I realise the implications are very much long-term but I feel that even in the early 1980s we need to look into the figure; we have to be futuristic about an inquiry such as this. We have to be looking at those sorts of advances and we need to be considering what sort of resource we are leaving future generations. If that means we need to study forest genetics to a greater degree than we do now, I believe that should be done.

I also feel, Mr President, that since the last select committee report, which contained certain recommendations relating to forests on private land, there have been significant developments relating to private forest areas. I refer to the establishment of the Private Forestry Division within the commission. In my opinion that should have been established 10 or 11 years ago. I understand the Forestry Act as written when the woodchip industry came into vogue did not allow the commission to do the sort of things it can now do in private forest areas. Only since the amendment to the Forestry Act has that been possible.

Mr President, I would like to draw your attention to a number of schemes which I think have great value for the private forest industry. The annuity scheme for pine planting is a very recent scheme. I only hope that as time goes on the industry can look at this type of scheme for hardwoods too. It is all very well having an annuity scheme for pine forests; our greatest asset is the eucalypts - the hardwood industry.

There is a number of other schemes - the pine plantation development loan scheme, the eucalypt plantation grant, native forest restoration grant, and special species establishing grants, along with nursery stock subsidies grants. These are just a few that the commission has already undertaken. Some are very recent; in fact I suspect some have not yet been put into practice. But the most interesting thing, Mr President, is that although this is very new, I am concerned that in that 1979-80 report only \$33 000 had been paid out as assistance in the area of private forestry. I sincerely hope that larger sums of money are made available for private forest areas in the future.

I would like to look very briefly at the Forestry Act of 1920 because, although many amendments have been made to it since that time, I believe there are a couple of areas which the commission should be equipped legislatively to handle. One of those is the establishment of certain species of native trees which are not considered to be commercial but which have very valuable timber. I specifically refer to the two best known ones: Huon pine of the *dacrydium franklini* species and King Billy pine. Those two species of timber have made significant contributions in certain areas of the timber industry - boat building in the case of Huon pine and, up until very recently, in joinery works in the case of King Billy pine.

But as I see it the Commission is unable to establish plantations of those species because their term of rotation is so long that it is not commercial - and the commission is set up as a commercial authority. Even though it can do some research on those species it cannot establish plantations of them. I believe it should, in the long-term interests of the State, because they are valuable species and have properties which very few timbers in the world have. I believe that is one of the areas that ought to be developed. The commission would be the best authority to handle it but it would need to be on a specific grant scheme.

I also feel that the commission ought to have the scope under the act to broadly research the protection of certain endangered species of plants within the State. I refer to some of the eucalypt species such as eucalyptus cordata, heart-leaf silver gum and spinning gum. I know they are specific species, Mr President, but they have a very

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small distribution in this State, particularly cordata which is endemic. There is a number of other endemic species - endemic meaning that they are only found in Tasmania - which could be endangered unless an authority working with forest species all the time has the power to manage their continued existence as part of its management operation.

If I may, Mr President, I will look very quickly at the role the previous committee played. Looking at its recommendations, there were two or three areas which struck me particularly. The expansion of regeneration of the reforestation program was one which was recommended by that select committee and I think all honourable members would be aware that the program has certainly expanded considerably since that report was handed down. There have been considerable advances in the field of private forestry - perhaps a little late; but I believe that the recommendations made by the previous report from this House have been catalytic in ensuring that this happened. Another recommendation which came from that previous report was the grading of saw-logs. That is something which has been with us for the last four or five years.

I believe that a committee inquiry into the industry at this stage can inform itself on new developments within the industry, and I have briefly mentioned some of those. It can look at the utilisation of what I term the remnant resource - which the honourable member for Macquarie mentioned earlier - to ascertain whether, with more advanced machinery and more advanced techniques, that resource can be made commercial. I am sure that is something to be looked at. It can review, as I have just mentioned, the role of the Forestry Commission, particularly in those two or three areas which, as a commercial authority, it cannot deal with.

It can consider the use of the resource nearer to the end product. It was quite pleasing to hear the honourable Leader's comments regarding the possibility of a new industry on the north-west coast to pulp what I assume anyway would be woodchips and to take that nearer to the end resource. I believe that Tasmanians would encourage that and I cannot for the life of me understand why the honourable Leader feels that an inquiry into the forestry industry, at this stage anyway, would affect those negotiations. Perhaps he or some other honourable member may be able to help me to understand that. If it is in the best interests of Tasmania, Mr President, I am sure it would be right within the terms of reference of this inquiry to investigate and render it the support it requires.

The best utilisation and management of land is terribly important too because in this day and age, in the early 1980s, we are looking at perhaps the field of agro-forestry which is a catchy term but terribly important when it comes to private land. I believe the scope is available for farming communities to have a very convenient marriage between agriculture and forestry. I have a couple of examples here. One in particular is in my electorate where a farmer is grazing land and growing trees on it at the same time. There is tremendous potential for this. It is not new; it is practised in New Zealand. I believe the results there are encouraging and I have no reason to suspect the results here would be any different. Perhaps an education process is necessary but certainly it is something the committee should be looking at because it is intended to look specifically at plantations and one can only assume that agro-forestry operations would come within that ambit.

Perhaps the main thing that an inquiry can do at this stage is to look at the future of Tasmania's forest industry. As I said when I first rose, I personally believe there is no reason for this inquiry to be a witch-hunt of any sort. The timing is right for an inquiry into the future of the industry so that we can make recommendations if necessary for the way in which the industry may develop in the future so that we are not introducing legislation into this system after a problem is risen. With the guidance of the many qualified people in the industry we can at least try to identify what some of those problems may be and perhaps foresee some of the problems ahead of us in the next decade or perhaps even in the next two decades.

Mr President, I thank you. I will close by saying that we should never lose sight of the fact that timber is a crop, that a forest - regardless of what is sometimes said by odd pressure groups - is a living world and that timber is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, in terms of natural assets, renewable resources that we have.

I support the motion, Mr President.

Members - Hear, hear.

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