



FORESTRY COMMISSION SELECT COMMITTEE

Mr COATES (Tamar) - *Mr President, before I proceed to move the motion standing in my name, I would like, in accordance with the provisions of standing order 76, to seek leave of the Council to alter the committee's terms of reference.*

The motion would then read:

That a select committee be appointed, with power to send for persons and papers, with leave to sit during any adjournment of the Council exceed 14 days and with leave to adjourn from place to place, to inquire into and report upon -

(1) the progress made by the Forestry Commission in the regeneration and management of Tasmania's eucalypt forests since 1972 and to evaluate whether the forest management policies are economically and environmentally sound:

(2) the policies and controls necessary to ensure forest regeneration and management on -

- (a) Crown land; and*
- (b) Private property;*

(3) the progress made by the Forestry Commission and others in the State in the establishment and management of exotic softwood plantations;

(4) whether further substantial areas of exotic softwood plantations should be established in the State, having regard to the future likely markets for -

- (a) softwood sawn timber;*
- (b) softwood pulpwood; and*
- (c) other softwood products;*

(5) the potential for development of plantations of native hardwood species in Tasmania;

(6) what measure should be undertaken by the Tasmanian Government to promote development of forestry and the forest industry; and

(7) any matters incidental to the above terms of reference,

and that Mr Braid, Mr Fletcher, Mr P.C.L. Hodgman, Mr McKay, Mr Wilson and the mover be of the committee.

Mr FLETCHER (Russell) - Mr President, I rise to support the proposal by the member for Tamar for a select committee to inquire into the matters outlined in his amended terms of reference.

Mr President, I seek your indulgence on this, my first occasion of standing before you and before this Chamber. It is, in fact, 10 years since a member for the electorate of Russell spoke from the floor of the House in other than a limited capacity. And I do not intend to indicate that my predecessor did anything less than a superb job in his representation of the electorate. Rather I allude to the fact that Mr Charles Fenton, my predecessor, served a period of 10 years as President of this Chamber and, as President, he lacked many opportunities to speak on behalf of his electorate. However I am sure the people of the electorate know of the work he did and, as individuals, they know of the service he gave to our electorate. I would add to that the fact that Mr Charles Fenton succeeded his uncle, the late Mr A B Fenton, and the Fenton family gave almost 50 years of community service, through service in this Council, to the people of Tasmania. That is indeed a most impressive record.

Mr President, I am sure the standard of integrity and impartiality that Mr Charles Fenton brought to this Chamber in his presiding decisions will long be remembered in this House. If they are not so remembered, it will only be because you, Sir, have aspired to the same standards of excellence, high integrity and impartiality as your predecessor and that in a very short time you will set your seal of excellence on the proceedings of this House. To date, Mr President, I have lacked a public forum in which to express my congratulations to you on your election as President of this Chamber and I welcome this opportunity to do so.

If you will give me licence, Mr President, I would also like to take the opportunity - and it will have relevance at a later stage - to pay tribute to one who served the area of Circular Head in another House. I refer to Mr Sydney Victor Ward, now retired, who gave great service to Tasmania and to the area of Circular Head in particular. I would mention that Mr Ward keeps well and takes a very active interest in local politics and in the affairs of this State. It has been to my benefit to have the counsel of both Mr Ward and Mr Fenton in the time since I was elected to represent the people of Russell in this Chamber.

As this may be my last chance to take such licence I would also like to put on record my gratitude to all those people of Russell - the farmers, the storekeepers, the service-station proprietors, the legal men, the teachers, the butchers, the bakers, and perhaps Uncle Tom Cobbley and all - who supported me in a very tangible way during the election campaign and gave me the opportunity to represent that area for the next six years in this House. It is an honour I feel very deeply and I pledge to you, Sir, and to this Chamber - and through you to the people of Russell - that I will do my best to uphold the very high standards which have been set in past years by this Chamber.

As it is some 10 years since anyone has had the chance to speak on behalf of the electorate of Russell perhaps I may take just a few minutes to reaffirm that the boundaries of Russell include the municipalities of Wynyard, Circular Head and King Island. These areas are remote from the capital of Tasmania and from this seat of government, but they are areas of tremendous wealth which contribute very much to the wealth of the State. It is not a highly industrialised area or one rich in minerals but

rather its industries are based on resources which we can reap and regenerate, keeping in close harmony with nature: beef, dairying, sheep, crop harvesting, vegetable production and processing, fishing and, of course, the matter under discussion here - the timber industry. The people of the area of Russell - Circular Head, Wynyard and King Island - are sons of the soil and they nurture nature to reproduce into perpetuity. And so forestry and forest-based industries touch the lives of these people to a very marked degree.

If the member for Tamar's proposal to establish this committee of inquiry is successful it will bring about the third such committee of inquiry of this House in the past 20-odd years. As the honourable member pondered the question, I suppose we will ask ourselves why such a committee is desirable at this stage. In fact the recent history of the forestry industry in Tasmania shows it to be an aggressive, well-managed and almost visionary industry. Some parties within the industry with whom I have spoken have been inclined to believe that the ship is on a steady course and that an inquiry of this nature at this time would largely be a waste of taxpayers' money. But I would like to suggest that an inquiry - an independent inquiry from without the industry - 10 years after the 1972 report is warranted and, indeed, is needed in the industry. I suggest it will monitor the progress of the past decade and will investigate the planned opportunities for the march to the year 2000 and beyond.

I would like to stress to honourable members that the forestry industry is of a long-term nature. Hardwood needed for industry in the year 2010 and even through to the year 2050 must be obtained from trees presently in our forests - including the present regrowth stands, the cut-over stands and the residual virgin stands. Thus it must be that the industry, projecting so far ahead, must always be looking at itself, considering its past history and considering whether its goals are attainable and whether its present goals are indeed being achieved. And I suggest that the review of the forestry industry should come from outside the industry. I know that in-house assessments of the situation are continuing all the time and at a very high level but if, as legislators, we are to be sure that the planning for a hundred years hence has a chance of success, we should be totally aware of and in tune with the planning that is going on.

I mentioned Mr Charles Fenton and Mr Sydney Victor Ward earlier and I think that mention will gain a little relevance at this stage. Indeed, Mr Ward was a minister in charge of forestry during the halcyon days of the Reece administration and Mr Fenton, as a member of the Legislative Council select committees of 1959 and 1972, had quite an impact on the findings of those committees. My research tells me that Mr Fenton's persistence with and encouragement of witnesses influenced the committee to recommend controlled burning and the clearing of dense under-storey for the regeneration of eucalypts in the wetter forest areas. This recommendation, accepted throughout the industry, had a major impact on the success of regeneration in that area in subsequent years.

The economic significance of forestry and the forest-based industries in Tasmania is of such importance to Tasmanians, and particularly to Tasmanians in the rural scene, that we as legislators must stay very closely in touch. We owe it to the people we represent to monitor the developments that are taking place. I am sure honourable members will be aware of the giants of industry in Tasmania - the giant employers of manpower such as Associated Pulp and Paper Mills Ltd at Burnie and Wesley Vale;

Australian Newsprint Mills Ltd; Associated Pulp and Paper Mills Ltd; the woodchip exporters; and all the various sawmills and furniture manufacturers throughout the State - and will appreciate the impact they have upon the State - not only economic but social as well. These major industries are contributing tremendous wealth to the State by virtue of their day-to-day running and in recent years APPM at Burnie has committed \$30 million, with a further \$2.5 million at Wesley Vale, and ANM Ltd at Boyer has outlaid \$12.5 million in expansion programs which are really the icing on the cake for the Tasmanian economy.

Mr President, I have asked members to consider the impact of forestry and forest-based industries on the Tasmanian economy but perhaps more importantly we should consider their impact on the rural community, because it particularly needs the assistance and the drive that is being generated. Much of the activity in the forest-based industries takes place in rural areas and I guess forestry itself is a rural activity. Consequently the economic benefits being distributed to these areas are benefits which would not otherwise have been distributed. The drift to the cities of young people leaving rural areas is being stopped to a degree by the activities which forestry industries are generating in the rural areas. Circular Head particularly has reaped enormous economic and social benefit from the expansion of forestry activity in the area and I am certain the same could be said for the areas of Glamorgan, Spring Bay, Beaconsfield, George Town - those areas adjacent to major woodchip export plants which have been developed in the past decade.

I have spoken on this theme to try to bring to the notice of members this extraordinary impact which forestry and forest-based industries have on Tasmania, and particularly on rural Tasmania. It is a broadly-based industry, touching the lives of Tasmanians in even the remotest areas - an industry of vast importance, which demands regular reviews to preserve the rights and the long-term best interests of Tasmania and Tasmanians.

Mr President, if I could use poetic licence, I would like to stress that I come 'not to bury Caesar but to praise him'. In endeavouring to praise the work of the forest-based industries, I am trying to bring out the impact they have had on many areas of vital need in Tasmania, which would not otherwise have received benefits. As legislators we need to monitor those developments.

Mr President, I would like to raise some areas of special concern which have been mentioned to me by people within and without the industry in recent times when they have realised that I am interested in this. I am not suggesting that these are areas of grave concern to the industry but they will reinforce some of the points which the member for Tamar raised earlier, and perhaps I will mention a couple of my own.

In the first instance I would like to mention private forest management. In both the previous reports, in 1959 and 1972, mention was made of private forests. The 1972 report recommended that the regeneration of cut-over areas of private property be kept under review. It said that if the existence of adequate private forests were threatened consideration should be given to the establishment of a private forest board or some such body to encourage and assist in the regeneration of forests on private land. The wood-chipping industry of the 1970s did prove to Tasmania that private forests were being placed in jeopardy and the member for Tamar mentioned the

Everett committee which conducted an inquiry into this matter in the mid 1970s. As a result of its finding the Private Forestry Division and the Private Forestry Council were established by an act of Parliament in 1977.

The Private Forestry Division has played a very active part in the development of private forests. But it is now four years down the track and by the time this committee has conducted its inquiry and has reached its conclusions it may be five or six years down the track. This is an opportune time for us legislators to be asking about the success of the Private Forestry Division and the Private Forestry Council. Is the council adequately funded? Do the private forest owners - the individuals who will have opportunities to give evidence to a committee of this nature - view the Private Forestry Council in the same manner as the council views itself? That is one area which such a committee could well investigate.

The second matter of prime concern which has been mentioned to me is that of land utilisation. As a fledgling member of Parliament I have been beset on both sides, by representatives of agriculture and by representatives of forestry, each group tugging for the same piece of land and wanting to develop its own area quite separately. In the cities or towns we can point directly to certain areas as residential, commercial, light industrial or heavy industrial. The areas are clearly defined and we can recognise them. But this cannot be said outside the town boundaries.

In the matter of land utilisation we now have the Mant Report which in itself poses some questions which are worthy of consideration, both within the commission and outside the commission by a committee of inquiry such as is envisioned here.

After alluding to the classification of land the Mant Report says on page 24:

'Behind some of the arguments between Forestry, Lands and National Parks and Wildlife there lies a change from a view of land management administration based on a single land use to one based on the multiple use of land.'

In referring to the transfer of land from one department to another or from a department back to the Lands Department, it says:

'In some cases there are complex procedures to go through before land can be transferred back to the Lands Department. For example, the resolution of both Houses of Parliament is required before land can be transferred out of the control of the Forestry Commission or the National Parks and Wildlife Service.'

At a later stage of the Mant Report, in referring to the Forestry Commission, it says:

'A case can be made for the Forestry Commission not having any land under its ownership. The land it presently "owns" could as well be managed by the new land management department with appropriate leases and licences being given to the Forestry Commission or direct to private companies. This would enable the Forestry Commission to concentrate on its primary function of advising the Government on the best means of managing the State's timber resources. The Commission could remain a specialist body rather than continuing its present path of developing its role as another multi-use land manager, but with a basic exploitative purpose.'

Mr President, some questions are raised there in relation to the utilisation of land in Tasmania. Because forestry and forest-based industries have such a vast area of Tasmania under State forests and under Crown leases, it is an area of concern and one which such a committee could consider.

The third point which I think worthy of consideration is future road development in Tasmania. A Forestry Commission pamphlet put out in 1981, in referring to road usage, says:

'An active road construction program is undertaken by the commission and the forest-based industries, primarily giving access for timber utilisation. This also provides a road network for fire protection and suppression, for educational and scientific activities and for public recreation.'

I would like to suggest there is also another factor to be considered in this - and that is tourism, which is one of the developing industries of our State. Particularly in the area of the far north-west of Tasmania, where the Forestry Commission has done amazing things in bridging the Arthur River and pushing logging roads south of the Arthur, it seems to me that we could well consider combining those logging roads, with the cooperation of the other government departments involved, so that that area of the far north-west could have the lifelink road so urgently needed for its embryo tourist industry. The tourist industry of the far north-west is stunted because people travelling to that area must return over exactly the same route; they cannot continue to circle the State by going down through those rich and attractive areas to the populous regions of the west coast - Savage River, Zeehan, Waratah and such places. So we have a situation where, with cooperation between various departments, a tourist road could be developed to serve both the logging and timber industry and the tourist industry, which would benefit the people of the far north-west as well.

The honourable member for Tamar mentioned the people at the forest floor level of the forestry industry- the loggers and contractors who fell the trees and cart them to the mills. I can say there is genuine concern in the community at the plight of these people. The social and economic impact of walking the razor's edge between allocation of quotas and lease repayments and overheads can have a disastrous effect on families. Perhaps these people are enticed into the industry by thoughts of big rewards. Certainly over-supply leads to a reduction in their activity. Is it a case of the contractor, the carter or the logger going in under-capitalised; is it a lack of basic business management skills, or is it a fault of the industry in that quotas are allocated without enough thought to the long-term viability of the forest floor workers?

While on the subject of the loggers and people working in the bush, Mr President, I consider another area of concern the training of such people in bush lore and bushcraft. The extremely high rate of premium for workers compensation insurance for bush workers - it is approximately 25 per cent of all wages paid for a person working in that area - suggests that these employees are either ill-trained or the nature of the work is extremely hazardous. I feel sure that industry interests are continually assessing and working on this problem but I ask again that we, as representatives of the people, inquire into it ourselves, ask the same questions, and prepare an independent report on the matters as we see them.

In conclusion, Mr President, I would like to read from the 'Submission by the Government of Tasmania to the Senate Standing Committee on Trade and Commercial Inquiry' of 1979. Section 4.8 of the report reads:

'Despite its size, Tasmania is the leading producer and exporter of the products of forestry and the forest-based industries in Australia. Within the State, these activities are of prime importance, not only to the economy but to the social well-being of the people of Tasmania.

The economic importance of the timber industry was well recognised by Sir Bede Callaghan when, in respect to proposals made to him by the Tasmanian Timber Association, he said, "the importance of the Tasmanian timber industry to the State and to the Nation now, and in the decades ahead, can scarcely be overstated".'

Mr President, I have tried to stress the magnitude of the forest-based industries and the way they impinge upon the lives of ordinary Tasmanians, and I have pleasure in supporting the motion of the honourable member for Tamar.

Members - Hear, hear.