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22 April 2010

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Government forestry assurances are whitewash: Industry can't support asset sale

Peak industry body Timber Queensland says media statements and correspondence on 20 and 21 April confirm fears that Government has been withholding information on the forestry asset sale and are prepared to walk away from historic South East Queensland (SEQ) Forestry Agreement and the Western Hardwoods Statewide Forests Process (SFP).

Timber Queensland CEO Rod McInnes said grandiose Government assurances that future of Queensland's timber industry and timber supply is secure are a whitewash.

"This Government can't be trusted. At the outset of selling Forestry Plantations Queensland (FPQ) Anna Bligh promised in her 'facts brochure' to establish the full 20,000 hectares of hardwood plantation by 2015 as agreed in the SEQ Forestry Agreement and the Western Hardwoods SFP," said Rod McInnes.

"A couple of months later and we discover that without any consultation to the industry and conservation signatories to the agreement, the Government has extended the date to 2025 and decided hardwood can replace existing softwood plantations - all at a time when our growing population means Queensland is already finding it difficult to meet its timber needs," he said.

"As one of the architects of the hardwood agreements, I can assure you that the intention was always for these hardwood plantations to be established on new land, not replace existing softwood plantation which the government has confirmed is possible.

"Indeed, if this has always been the case, why then has 99% of the current hardwood plantation been established on new land and not on converted existing softwood plantation and saved the taxpayers millions of dollars?"

"The fact is the Bligh Government is demonstrating they care little about the 20,000 jobs and \$4 billion per annum the timber industry provides Queensland, nor are they concerned with conservation, but they are prepared to abandon a landmark agreement to make a quick buck."

Rod McInnes said public Government assertions that Timber Queensland has been kept informed during the asset sale process are simply not true.

"Not once during this process has the Government sought to brief Timber Queensland on the Sale process. Any information gained has had to be specifically pursued and then only scant details have been provided," he said.

"The obvious question is – what else don't we know about the Asset Sale?"

"Given this Industry can't support the Sale."

ENDS

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ATTACHED – 21 April Letter sent to Hon. Andrew Fraser, Treasury & Minister for Employment & Economic Development.

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