

PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

MEDIA RELEASE

DRAPER URGES MINISTER TO FAST TRACK BIOREGION DECISION

26th February 2004

Member for Tamworth Peter Draper has called on the Minister for Natural Resources Craig Knowles to fast track the assessment of the Brigalow Belt South Bioregion which is putting local industry and jobs at risk.

Mr Draper told Parliament the absence of a decision had led to disruption of logging activities and the locking up of valuable machinery by protesters in the Mission State Forest, north west of Gunnedah.

He said the actions of the protesters opposing the logging in the Terry Hie Hie group of forests had put in jeopardy the operations of Gunnedah Timbers that employs 36 people, and Bingara Cypress Pine with 15 employees.

"It is deplorable that the immediate and long term future of Gunnedah's timber milling industry should come down to half a dozen protesters holding employers and workers to ransom," Mr Draper said.

He criticised the actions of the protesters who had locked up the logging machinery valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars for over a week.

"The contractor concerned was operating legally under government-sanctioned authority," Mr Draper said. "Gunnedah Timbers has contracts and orders to fill, including exports to Japan and the United States.

"The certainty of supply to foreign clients is a corner stone of the company's operations and if that is threatened the company's future could be severely compromised."

Mr Draper said a third of white cypress timber industry in the Pilliga, which produces an annual return of around \$12.5 million, is exported. Submissions by the Greens that the yield should be cut to around a third of current production were "unbalanced".

He urged the Minister to make a decision soon to guarantee the supply of timber from the forests to keep local industries viable while ensuring good environmental outcomes.

"The Sinclair Report on the management options for the bio region has been sitting on the Minister's desk for five weeks and the ongoing delay in making a decision is creating an atmosphere of uncertainty for all stakeholders," Mr Draper said.

End Release.

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