

PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

MEDIA RELEASE

Walcha needs community interests safeguarded should Forests NSW softwood plantations be sold

21 October 2004

Member for Tamworth Peter Draper has called on the NSW Government to safeguard community interests against privatisation of the state's softwood timber plantations to ensure the timber industry's longevity in Walcha, Nundle and surrounding areas.

Mr Draper told Parliament yesterday if the NSW Department of State Development chose to sell off softwood plantations currently owned by Forests NSW, communities reliant on the timber industry such as Walcha and Nundle could be at risk of reduced access, increased fire hazards and economic downturn.

"There's a lot of concern in the community that Forests NSW resources will be privatised and softwood plantations will be sold off to overseas interests. The sale may not necessarily be a bad move but we need to have strategies in place to ensure communities such as Walcha and Nundle are not disadvantaged," Mr Draper said.

Mr Draper said Walcha Shire Council was taking a proactive role toward protecting community interests by lobbying the Government as a member of the Consortium of Timber Producing Councils.

The council was also working toward long-term sustainability of the industry through the Walcha Softwood Plantation Development Strategy which could see plantations increase from 13,000ha to 50,000ha in future years.

"In essence the council is not opposed to the sale providing issues such as local employment, rates, road maintenance, bush fire protection, investment in timber processing, local knowledge, salinity, use of the resource and public access to forest roads are quarantined from any sale process," Mr Draper said.

"What guarantees does the community have that private interests will replant the trees and not go for a quick return by flogging off the existing resources? The community deserves answers to these questions."

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Mr Draper said a \$50million Forests NSW contract to cut and cart plantation pine timber recently awarded to Walcha haulage and harvest company Brian Smith Timber Transport provided certainty for the local industry for the next 10 years.

“The projected economic benefits around Walcha and Nundle are expected to be significant, but it is the long-term prospects of the industry which need to be protected,” he said.

End release

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