

WA Premier faces timber industry anger

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Reporter: Lisa Stingel

PETER CAVE: West Australian Premier Richard Court has had to face the anger of forestry workers who stand to lose their jobs after he agreed to a compromise on the State's Regional Forest Agreement. The Manjimup airport in the south west of the State was blockaded as the Premier arrived to explain why he'd surrendered to the views of conservationists. Lisa Stingel prepared this report.

RICHARD COURT: Hang on, what you've got to understand is you have got....well there is a Labor opposition that is going to stop logging in old growth jarrah forests, in old growth jarrah. And the point I'm saying to you [interjections from crowd] [inaudible] after the next election, next election.

LOGGER'S WIFE: You can see my children's faces here. These are kids and amongst hundreds down here that the government are now going to be supporting and paying for; for their food and for their clothing because my husband hasn't got a job.

UNIDENTIFIED: Our local bank managers are saying no to people who are applying for jobs, for a home loan. They're saying it's not a good idea to buy [inaudible].

LISA STINGEL: Changes to the RFA were made in response to intense community pressure and the concessions include an end to logging of old growth karri and tingle forests after 2003 and an immediate end to clear felling of karri forests. But in the south west those concessions mean the loss of 1,500 jobs. So, when Richard Court attempted to sell his new package to the timber communities, it fell on deaf ears.

LOGGER: Our issue is not redundancies; it's jobs. All the workers said, 'Look stuff redundancy. We don't care. We want to keep our jobs.' This is our last hope. We've got no hope. There are no jobs. Look at this place over here. We don't want a job over there sweeping it out, cleaning it up, putting it in mothballs. The whole place, there's no jobs. That's the problem. If you could offer us jobs, it probably wouldn't be so bad.

2nd LOGGER: No redundancy package either.

LOGGER: Ah who cares redundancy package. I want to work. It's the Australian ethos, isn't it? It's the hard working Aussie, he's getting canned by someone who doesn't want to work. Do you want the whole community ending up like the people in the bush? Just sitting around doing nothing? Is that fair? Is that the Australian ethos; the hard-working battler; people with children who want to put a meal on the table and clothe them? I don't want my kids be wondering what they're going to have for tea tomorrow night. I've worked hard for a lot of years, as all these people have. All this suffering, and yet we get treated like shit.

LISA STINGEL: And later, as Richard Court attempted to fly out of Manjimup, two workers employed the tactics of conservationists, chaining themselves to the Premier's plane.

WORKERS: We're locking on to this aeroplane like the greenies lock on to us, our machines, out in the bush, just to show Dick what we've had to put up with for the last three years. We're not happy with the RFA, what's happened, the outcome, and we really want change.

LISA STINGEL: Richard Court was forced to return to Perth by car, leaving less than impressed local Liberal MPs to deal with the flack. Local Government Minister whose seat

takes in the south west, Paul Omodei, says the Liberal government has let the workers down.

PAUL OMODEI: The government has made a decision that didn't need to be made. So yes, it's been a political decision all the way down the line. And, when you introduce politics into any subject, commonsense takes a backseat. And I'm very disappointed. Look, in the end you finish up with either a Labor government or a Liberal government in this state, and the Labor Party has really just deserted its supporters in the bush and in this case the Liberal Party, because of pressure from the city, has done the same.

PETER CAVE: Western Australia's Minister for Local Government, Paul Omodei.

State Government to accelerate changes to forest management in WA [Audio]

Tuesday, 27 July 1999

27/7/99



Richard Court

- [prerfa1.wav](#)
- [prerfa2.wav](#)
- [prerfa3.wav](#)

Logging in old growth Karri and Tingle forests will end when current contracts expire as part of a State Government decision to accelerate changes to forest management in Western Australia.

Premier Richard Court today also announced that the woodchipping industry would move through a rapid transition over the next few years to become a predominantly plantation-based industry.

Mr Court said there would also be major changes to forest management practices in Western Australia - including an end to large scale clearfelling in the Karri forest and a revision of existing logging programs to 2003 (the current contract period) to minimise the impact on old growth Karri and Tingle.

While the revised logging plans are being developed there will be a three month moratorium on logging of old growth in Karri and Tingle areas - other than those already being logged, or due to be logged, to meet 1999 contractual commitments.

Mr Court said that following discussions involving himself, Environment Minister Cheryl Edwardes and a range of interested parties, the Government had agreed to these and other measures which would complement the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA).

"There can be no doubt that the RFA has been a major step forward for forest management in Western Australia and the Coalition Government remains committed to it," Mr Court said.

"Following ongoing community debate, however, the Government acknowledges that further change is required.

"The changes are a genuine attempt to bring logging practices into line with community feeling, while at the same time maintaining a viable timber industry that is so important to this State - and in particular many communities in the South-West.

"There is no denying, however, that these communities will bear the brunt of the pain from our decision to accelerate the restructuring plan."

Mr Court said the measures to be implemented included:

Karri and Tingle

- end old growth logging in Karri and Tingle forests after 2003 (except where the EPA determines necessary for forest protection and enhancement);
- review logging plans to 2003 to minimise use of old growth Karri and Tingle to satisfy current contracts;
- a three month moratorium on logging of old growth in Karri and Tingle areas while the logging plans are revised (other than those already being logged, or due to be logged, to meet 1999 contractual commitments); and -
- end large scale clearfelling in the Karri forest.

Woodchipping

- cease woodchipping in old growth Karri and Tingle forests from the end of the current supply contract in 2003 (forest thinnings and sawmill residue would still be used for woodchips);
- move to a predominantly plantation-based industry; and -
- currently Bunnings Forest Products has contracts to supply woodchips to Japan until 2005 and contracts to take the resource from CALM until 2003. The Government will hold discussions with the company to see if variations can be made to these arrangements.

Jarrah

- prepare a Jarrah strategy so that harvesting is limited to what is needed to satisfy approved uses, with the emphasis on value adding. There will be strict auditing of the value adding requirement under existing contracts and future contracts could be terminated if the requirements are not met; and -
- write no new contracts to use native timber for railway sleepers (other than from third grade timber and then only if the new State Conservation Authority determines that there is no more valuable use for the timber).

Plantations

- encourage farm forestry, which would see areas of plantation integrated with traditional farming practices;
- maximise the contribution of private plantations for sawmilling and value added production;
- increase the use of plantation and re-growth timbers for high value products and value adding; and -
- explore a range of options, such as carbon credits and tax concessions, to create incentives for additional investment in plantation timber - including sawlog based tree crops.

Royalty Review

- bring forward from 2003 a review of timber royalties.

Mr Court said a taskforce of Ministers from relevant portfolios would be formed to monitor the effects on employment in the South-West region and bring forward recommendations on the development of opportunities and assistance for affected communities.

"The plan agreed to by Government is intended to build

on and accelerate measures already announced as part of the RFA," Mr Court said.

"This plan requires major change to logging practices and forest conservation measures in WA - the community, and particularly environmental groups, need to acknowledge that.

"It has been a tough decision to accelerate the restructuring plan given its impact on a number of communities in the South-West.

'There is no easy solution, however, the Government accepts the need to move more quickly to a greater reliance on plantation timber. We will speed up existing plans that would have seen plantation stocks quadrupled to an estimated 800,000 ha by 2020.

"These latest measures remain in line with our long term commitment to forest conservation and a sustainable timber industry."

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"There is significant pain associated with these changes. We are talking about communities, we are talking about peoples' jobs."

"There is no doubt there is a pressure cooker situation and some pressure needs to be released. I believe the key point will be a decision to cease the logging in old growth Karri and Tingle forests at the expiration of current contracts."

"In no way are we walking away from the RFA and the Federal Government knows that. The RFA is very much the basis on which we are proceeding with forestry management."