

Queensland Government allows timber industry to keep harvesting native forest, says it will save up to 500 Wide Bay-Burnett jobs

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The Queensland Government made the decision to extend the current harvesting permits in the Wide Bay-Burnett region until 2026 but would not say how much land would be accessed.

The current permits were due to expire in 2024, threatening up to 500 workers.

Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said Cabinet decided to back "sustainable" jobs in the region.

"These are good, decent jobs," she said.

"Some of those hardwood plantations didn't work in the areas they were designated to, so where else is there the possibility that they can?"

"This announcement will help secure the employment of 500 Maryborough and Wide Bay locals working in the industry.

"It's also a win for hundreds more people and businesses who indirectly rely on the timber industry."

Instead, about 20,000 hectares of state-owned land south of Noosa will now be slated for conservation by 2024.

Ms Palaszczuk said environmental groups had no reason to be concerned.

"I think the environmental groups should look at our record," she said.

"We introduced nation-leading vegetation management laws in this state. We introduced the sustainable Ports Legislation in relation to the Great Barrier Reef. We banned plastic bags.

"We are going to introduce — very shortly — our land-restoration program, we've introduced Clean Co., we're looking at a renewable hydrogen industry.

"We've actually proven our environmental credentials."

The Opposition said the Government dragged its feet on the decision.

"It is basically a two-year delay of hundreds of job losses," the LNP's spokesman for Forestry, Tony Perrett, said in a statement.

"It is a political fix for Labor, not an economic fix for the workers.

"The announcement ... falls well short of the security the industry requires."

Environment groups 'concerned'

The National Parks Association of Queensland said it was concerned about the environmental outcomes of the decision.

"We are concerned that this might be a bit of a snap decision on what was originally considered," conservation principal Laura Hahn said.

"We haven't seen the detail on how they plan to balance conservation outcomes. But certainly, it's concerning if they're looking at delays on transferring of native forest to national parks."

Ms Hahn said the association was concerned about "continual delays" in the release of the protected area system.

"It was supposed to be out for some time and we really need that and appropriate funding for expanding national parks," she said.

She said she wants the State Government to invest in the expansion of protected areas as a matter of priority.

"We'll definitely sit down with the Government and talk about how conservation values can be balanced.

"More importantly we want to see the State Government investing in the expansion of protected areas, specifically national parks.

"Really what we need is the expansion of the protected areas system because it's urgently needed for climate and threatened species resilience."

Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-04/native-forest-opened-to-timber-industry-to-save-jobs/11670254>