



**Kelvin Thomson MP
Federal Member for Wills**

Threatened and Extinct Species

**House of Representatives
Thursday 14th February 2008**

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (4.33 pm)—

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I congratulate you on your election to high office. It is very well deserved indeed. I consider it a grotesque piece of arrogance on our part as a human race that we think we have the right to destroy other species—plants, birds and animals—on our way to affluence. While some species have prospered as a result of human activity, the vast majority have not, and many species are now threatened with extinction.

In December 2005, the USA based National Academy of Sciences reported that human activities are leading to a wave of extinctions that is over a hundred times greater than natural rates. According to the World Conservation Union, almost 800 species have become extinct since the year 1500, when more accurate records began. The Alliance for Zero Extinction has identified a further 800 species on the brink of oblivion. These species are confined to around 600 sites around the world. Only one-third of them enjoy legal protection, and most are surrounded by human population densities approximately three times the global average.

Human activity has increased extinction by between 1,000 and 10,000 times the normal level in rainforests as a result of reduction in area alone. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, the earth is down to its last five per cent of tropical forest cover and is losing that at a rate of over 200,000 square kilometres a year, with the rate of loss increasing. The world has entered the 21st century with little more than 10 per cent of its original forest cover intact and, according to the anthropologists Richard Leakey and Roger Lewis, all the forest cover will be largely gone by the year 2050.

The country which has the world's worst record for species extinction turns out to be Australia: 27 mammal species, 23 bird species and four frog species have become extinct over the past 200 years. Our wildlife is some of the most beautiful and unusual in the world.

We are known around the world for our unique wildlife but, unfortunately, we have a very poor track record of protecting it. Everyone knows about the loss of the Tasmanian tiger, a stunning animal which is now sadly extinct, but people are less well aware of just how bad our overall track record is. We have the worst rate of mammal extinction in the world. Since European colonisation, about 10 per cent of Australia's mammals have become extinct. In fact, almost half the mammals that have become extinct globally in the past 200 years have been Australian.

The World Wildlife Fund says—and they are right— that we urgently need to build a safety net of terrestrial and marine protected areas to help our unique and threatened wildlife weather the upheavals of climate change. We need to reduce the impact of invasive species like foxes and cats on our native species, we need to assist Indigenous Australians to manage fire on their country and prevent late hot dry-season fires wiping out species and their habitats and, above all, everyone needs to commit to reducing carbon emissions to prevent a wave of mass species extinctions in Australia. I believe there is an opportunity to strengthen the protection for threatened species and their habitats in the review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, which the Labor government has promised.

The last government failed to keep the EPBC Act list of threatened ecological communities up to date because it was pandering to National Party pressure. This has meant that large tracts of threatened habitat across the country are not receiving the protection that is warranted from the federal government under the legislation. We need to recognise the importance of biodiversity protection; it is a crucial part of this country's climate change mitigation efforts. We need a major national biodiversity action plan and a national biodiversity initiative. I commend for the consideration of the government, the parliament and the people of Australia such an initiative, which has been put forward by the Humane Society International. I commend the Humane Society International and WWF for their essential work. I urge all Australians to support their efforts at work. I urge us to ensure that we will not allow other species to become extinct on our watch during our lifetimes.

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