



Kelvin Thomson MP
Federal Member for Wills

ADJOURNMENT
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[Mr KELVIN THOMSON](#) (Wills) (11.09 a.m.)—The Humane Society International has put forward two legislative proposals for consideration to help protect the world's rainforests. The first proposal is for the creation of a federal 'debt for nature' or 'debt for carbon' scheme, which would enable the foreign debt that a country owes to Australia to be reduced or cancelled if that country instead takes action to protect its tropical forests. The second proposal is to amend the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act to prohibit the importation of illegal or unsustainably sourced timber products and to regulate the importation of timber, palm oil and other tropical forest products from developing countries.

Humane Society International points out that the proposals are not without precedents. Legislation for debt for nature swaps and for prohibitions on illegally harvested wood products is operating successfully in the United States, and the Illegally Logged Timber (Prohibition of Sale and Distribution) Bill 2007-08 was introduced to the British parliament in April. The United States' Tropical Forest Conservation Act 1998 enables eligible developing countries to relieve the debt they owe to the United States by investing moneys to support local tropical forest conservation activities. At least 10 countries have agreements with the US under the act, which recognises both the biodiversity benefits and the carbon benefits of protecting tropical forests in developing countries. A similar act could be introduced into Australia. The Environmental Defenders Office of New South Wales states that Australia is owed more than \$1.5 billion in debt by developing countries with significant reserves of tropical forests, including Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. This presents considerable opportunities for a debt for nature scheme.

The proposal to ban illegally logged timber imports would be consistent with the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development of 1992, our obligations under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Tropical Timber Agreement. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, in my view, is the appropriate place for the regulation of tropical forest imports. A new part could be introduced to deal with international movement of tropical forest products similar to that concerning the international movement of wildlife specimens in accordance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

Recently, the United States became the first jurisdiction in the world to prohibit the import, sale or trade of illegally harvested wood and wood products. Australia

is, after China and Japan, the third biggest consumer of timber and timber products in the Asia-Pacific region, and in 2005 a Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry commissioned report found that approximately nine per cent, or \$452 million, of all timber and timber products imported into Australia came from an illicit source. Clearly we need to tackle this.

I note that there are other measures being taken to protect the world's rainforests, and I welcome those measures. In particular, the Papua New Guinea-Australia Forest Carbon Partnership was announced in March this year and it is noted as part of that partnership that:

Rainforests contribute to global climate stability and underpin our global ecosystem. Nearly two thirds of Papua New Guinea's land area is forested, hosting some of the richest flora and fauna in the world and more than seven percent of the planet's biodiversity.

It was also noted that:

Australia and Papua New Guinea supported the December 2007 Bali Climate Change Conference mandate that reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries should be part of a future international climate change framework..

It is noted that between 18 and 25 per cent of the entire world's carbon emissions come from deforestation and land use changes. So I commend the work that has been done around those issues but I also think that the proposals that have been put forward by the Humane Society International involving the potential amendment of Australian legislation could be of benefit, and I commend them for consideration to the government and the parliament.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and the contributions that have been made throughout the House of Representatives this year by colleagues and members on all sides and I wish them, their families and the parliamentary staff, who I know have been making a mighty contribution throughout the course of the past year, all the best for Christmas and for the New Year.