



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

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SCHEME BILL 2009 [NO. 2]**

**CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION
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**CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION
SCHEME AMENDMENT (HOUSEHOLD
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Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 28 October 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Thomson, Kelvin, MP

Source House
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (1.33 pm)—I have a great deal of respect for the member for New England and I generally pay very close attention to what he has to say. I think in this instance he is very wide of the mark. He suggests that we should delay passing this legislation and delay action until after the Copenhagen conference on climate change. The truth is that, when countries go to Copenhagen, regrettably, there is a tendency for each country to try and get away with doing as little as it possibly can and asking other countries to carry the load and do as much as they possibly can. If we go to Copenhagen and suggest that other countries need to act—and indeed we should do that, and members of the opposition who said this is a global problem that has to be addressed globally are correct—to reduce their carbon emissions, they will say to us, ‘What are you doing?’ If we do not have this legislation through this place, through this parliament, we will be essentially going to Copenhagen empty-handed. Other countries will say, ‘That is very interesting,’ and they will move on. If we are to have credibility in Copenhagen we need to have the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2009 [No. 2] and related bills through the parliament. Those who think that it is okay to postpone this debate, and who seek to postpone the debate in the Senate, are doing the planet a great disservice because they will be contributing to the prospective failure of talks at Copenhagen.

When the member for New England said that we are potentially losing land from food production towards agroforestry, it is true. We should be mindful of the need to retain land for food production, but in that context I draw to his attention and to the attention of the House just how much potential land for food production is being lost as a result of urban sprawl, expanding cities, in Australia and throughout the world and the need for us to be mindful of the increased size of our cities and the impact of that on food production.

It is my view that Australian forests and other parts of the Australian landscape need to be acting as carbon sinks by soaking up carbon that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere. Retaining and re-establishing vegetation will help ameliorate the effects of global warming. I am pleased to see initiatives in this bill that go to that issue. Carbon emissions from deforestation account for some 18 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. That is a very substantial amount, so we need to look to addressing this issue.

The CPRS bill enables Australian liable entities to offset 100 per cent of their emissions through the purchase of international credits, such as those that may be available through what is known as the REDD mechanism, the reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. That REDD mechanism is currently being negotiated at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The government has said that it will be able to achieve five per cent of the potential 25 per cent emission reduction target for 2020 from international offsets such as REDD.

The Humane Society International have pointed out that deforestation and forest degradation is responsible for a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions, and they are very supportive of a REDD market mechanism as a means to address it. But they have expressed concern that negotiations for this mechanism have been going badly off track and noted that the negotiating text for REDD presented at the Bangkok negotiating session just recently made no mention of forest protection and instead risked REDD becoming a massive carbon subsidy for continued industrial logging, an activity that gives rise to a lot of carbon emissions.

I believe this is an issue that needs to be addressed because there is a role for forests and vegetation as a carbon sink, and that role ought to be one not only of being a carbon sink but also of protecting wildlife. Just in the last couple of weeks, we have seen scientific studies released about the extent to which Australian native birds and other wildlife are in serious decline, and that is from a combination of land clearing and habitat destruction and climate change, prolonged droughts and things of that nature dramatically reducing their numbers. For example, in Victoria a 12-year study has indicated that there are reduced numbers of well-known species such as the kookaburra, honeyeaters, thornbills, lorikeets and so on. Right around Australia there is this pattern of wildlife destruction and habitat loss. I think that the REDD mechanism, which is proposed as part of the climate change negotiations, ought to be having regard to that.

I want to issue a plea to those opposite to stop the undermining, the white-anting of action on climate change. I have talked frequently in this House about

climate change. I have talked about it as a scientific issue and as a moral issue. I listened to debate from those opposite this morning and it is clear to me that they are not interested in having regard to these matters, so I want to ask them to look at the politics of this issue. When the coalition was beaten in 2007, the key issue was unquestionably Work Choices. The second most significant issue was the decade of inaction on climate change. Only a couple of days ago, research was put out by the company Essential Research, going to the question of, 'Which party do you think is best at handling each of the following issues?' On the topic of climate change, 35 per cent said that Labor was best and 17 per cent said that the coalition was best. So more than twice as many people supported the Labor Party's handling of climate change issues than supported that of the coalition. They also asked, 'Do you think the federal government's emissions trading scheme goes too far in favouring big business, goes too far in favouring the environment movement or has the balance about right?' Thirty per cent said that they thought it went too far in favouring big business; 17 per cent said they thought it went too far in favouring the environment movement.

What is the coalition's response to this? They suggest more concessions for big business. They are completely out of touch with the views of the electorate. This was a key issue in costing them the 2007 election yet they continue on a path that is totally at odds with the views of an electorate which understands that we need action on climate change and understands that we need to put a price on carbon in order to change the extravagant and wasteful practices of the past and take us down a renewable energy path. I heard the remarks of the Leader of the National Party this morning when he said that people will not turn off their air conditioners. I am the first to acknowledge that we have been extravagant, but after all the debate in this place has the Leader of the National Party not heard of renewable energy? The direction in which we need to move is wind power, solar power and geothermal power. We need to move to electric vehicles. It is not a question of whether we turn off the air conditioner on a particular day or go back to some more primitive lifestyle. It is a question of coming up with renewable, sustainable energy sources, and that is what this legislation is all about.

We need to take this legislation to Copenhagen. It is regrettable that the opposition does not understand the need for action on this matter. It is to their political detriment that they failed to act on this matter. We have the National Party being pushed off the coast. It has lost the electorates of Dawson, Lyne, Page and Richmond. That is because it has no affinity with people living on the coast who understand these climate change issues and the need for action in relation to them. Why am

I offering free political advice to those opposite? It is because this is important. This matter is more important than the fortunes of my political party or the political parties of those opposite. If we do not take action on climate change, and scientists are telling us that the next 10 years are critical, we will see a world progressively in a state of global breakdown.

On the news all the time these days there are stories of conflict, war, terrorism, boat people—you name it. Some of the proximate causes of those issues are things like religious fundamentalism, but underlying this is a contest for scarce resources, which are being rendered more scarce as a consequence of overpopulation and climate change, and these things are in turn driving conflict, terrorism, boat people and the like. This global breakdown that we are seeing symptoms of every day will get worse in coming years and decades if we do not act. So this issue matters. I urge the opposition to stop the white-anting, stop the undermining and get behind the need for legislation to put a price on carbon, to enable us to start reducing our emissions. Last year our emissions went up by one per cent. We need to start tracking towards an emissions reduction path of 60 per cent or, better yet, 80 per cent by 2050. We need to start getting emissions down. The way to do this is to put a price on carbon; therefore, I urge the House to support the bill.