



Speech by
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Hansard 28 April 2004

NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (8.55 p.m.): I rise in support of the Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2004. Since 1959 under the Forestry Act in Queensland, owners of freehold land and other interested parties can enter into contracts about the ownership, use and economic benefits of natural resources on freehold land in Queensland. This common law mechanism in Queensland allowed the owners of land to enter into an agreement with another person about the natural resources products on their land, and natural resources products under the Queensland Land Title Act 1994 include all parts of a tree, vegetation and, equally important, carbon stored in trees or in vegetation. However, this mechanism is not available for leasehold land, which is what this bill sets out to rectify. This bill seeks to amend the Land Act 1994, the Forestry Act 1959 and the Land Title Act 1994. It also makes minor amendments to a few other pieces of legislation.

I wish to take this opportunity to speak on a few issues, including global warming, carbon commodities and the Kyoto protocol, which is one of the fundamental reasons behind this bill. Greenhouse gas emissions are changing the global climate. According to Professor Ian Lowe of the Griffith University, the average temperature is now about 0.7 degrees higher than it was 100 years ago and there have been significant changes in rainfall patterns. The scientific analysis of the changes and the role of human emissions in greenhouse gases have steadily become more clear. The further assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that most of the warming over the last 50 years is attributable to human activity.

The modelling in the further assessment report shows that the smallest increase in temperature predicted on the most optimistic scenario of fossil fuel use reduction and the most cautious interpretation of the science is a further 1.5 degrees by the end of this century. We have associated changes in rainfall and sea levels, as well as the frequency and severity of extreme events. Other more likely scenarios of fuel use and other interpretation of the scientific uncertainty predict much larger increases in temperature and more severe changes in other areas. The Global Change Science Conference in Amsterdam warned that many of the parameters of the earth's natural system are now outside the range of previous human experience, making it quite possible that we could see serious disruption.

The report in Queensland by the rainfall cooperative research centre also indicated that climate change will bring more natural disasters and diseases to Queensland in the next 50 years and that those events will be increasingly deadly. It also says that the future will bring feral pest plagues and will destroy vegetation and predicts a forecast climate change of up to 3.5 degrees in the next 50 to 100 years and could render extinct most of Queensland's rainforest and tropical birds, reptiles, frogs and mammals. The consequences of climate change for Australia are very serious and potentially damaging. The assessment draws attention to the impact of climate change on the Wet Tropics, mountain areas, rivers and wetlands in other parts of the state. It also found that cyclones, droughts, heatwaves, bushfires and high winds could occur more often and for longer periods.

Action has been forced through recognition of the economic and social consequences of the climate change being projected. The Kyoto agreement sought recognition by leaders of the world community that climate change demanded considered political action. Australia should sign the Kyoto agreement so that we play our part as responsible members of the world community to avert the sort of disastrous outcomes that have been predicted. Under the Kyoto agreement, the developed world as a whole, which has been responsible for about 80 per cent of the human production of greenhouse

gasses from fossil fuels, is obliged to reduce emissions to 95 per cent of the 1990 figure by the 2008-2012 period.

Australia is required to limit its emission abatement to 108 per cent of the 1990 figure. The Australian government obtained this uniquely generous target at Kyoto by essentially threatening to withdraw from the convention unless we were given special treatment. As a further concession, the Kyoto conference agreed to a last-minute request by the Australian government delegation at 4 a.m. on the last morning of the meeting that I know of to include land use, changing the 1990 baseline and the 2008-2012 target. This provision is known as the Australia clause, because we were the only OECD country engaging in large-scale land clearing in 1990. So we are the only country that will get a free ride, so to speak, towards this Kyoto target simply by reducing the rate of clearing native vegetation—something we need to do to address other problems such as salinity and the state of our inland rivers.

As the world's largest per capita emitter of greenhouse gases, we have a particular responsibility to play our part. As a long-term solution to the problem, we need to involve developing nations in a future international agreement to reduce emissions to the level required to stabilise the atmosphere. It is about 40 per cent of the present level. There is absolutely no chance of achieving this goal if a nation, including Australia, is prepared to risk the entire planetary climate system for the sake of a few short-term profits.

Even Prime Minister John Howard admitted this during an interview in 2002 when he said—

We all agree that climate change is a huge challenge, and we all agree that there is, or I certainly accept that there is evidence of global warming. I think everybody sensibly who addresses this subject does. And it's something that's got to be dealt with over a period of time. We are unwilling for national interest reasons to sign up to Kyoto at present because of the absence of the developing countries and the United States, but we are committed to meeting our obligation.

That is absolute nonsense. Basically, the Prime Minister is saying that we agree that there are dangers to our atmosphere, but we will not commit ourselves. The stance of the Australian government at the Kyoto conference and since that meeting constitutes a major obstacle to the development of a genuine global agreement. It also gives aid and comfort to the others obstructing progression towards the goal, such as the current United States administration and some oil exporting nations such as Saudi Arabia.

One of the hallmarks of a leader is commitment. Prime Minister Howard's leadership on the issue of reducing greenhouse effects is less than desirable. Basically, he is saying, 'Let us wait until Mr Bush says yes, then I will follow. Wait until another country takes the leap, then we will follow'. Owing to the Prime Minister's inaction, it seems that the United Nations treaty on the Kyoto protocol is resting on countries like Russia, which has been unreliable on its stance. On 16 April this year, Russia indicated that it would not sign the Kyoto protocol. Then again a few days later—only seven days before today—on 21 April I read that the Russian government is now prepared to sign the Kyoto agreement.

On greenhouse issues, the federal government's record has been very disappointing. We have no national greenhouse strategy, no real commitment to renewable energy, no commitment to significant reductions in greenhouse pollution, no commitment to a carbon tax and the contempt for the Kyoto protocol continues. Whether it is slashing funding to renewable energy research, dumping green housing emission trading proposals, or continuing to undermine Kyoto, Labor's view is very clear. On 29 January at the Labor Party conference, Mark Latham said that, as a nation, we are big enough to protect the environment and ratify the Kyoto protocol. This is the mark of a leader. This bill seeks to enable leasehold land to trade on carbon commodities, which will help reduce the greenhouse effect. I fully commend this bill to the House.