



Speech by
Ronan Lee

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

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VOLUNTARY CARBON CREDIT TRADING BILL

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (8.36 pm): Tonight it is an absolute delight to rise in the House following the wonderful contribution by the member for Capalaba, and also the contribution by the Minister for Mines and Energy. I thank both of them for the comments that they made this evening.

I confess that I was genuinely surprised when I noticed that the opposition proposed a bill that in some way purported to provide some protection for our environment. I was surprised because, certainly during my time in this place, the opposition has been quite simply stuck in a 1950s style of environmental thinking that involved digging things up, chopping them down and polluting them. They have been surly about the Queensland government's world-leading laws to outlaw broadscale tree clearing. They have been positively poisonous about wild rivers legislation. On numerous occasions in this place they have shown a lack of understanding about water issues that borders on the irresponsible. They are flippant when it comes to issues about protecting ducks and whales. They have been all but silent when it comes to pressuring the federal Liberal and National Party government to do the one thing that the Australian nation has not done but should, which is to sign the Kyoto protocol.

In light of all of that, I was surprised to see this type of bill proposed. As members would know, I come into this parliament with a genuine passion for protecting our environment. Frankly, our planet is broken and I am keen to work with all of the members of this place to fix it. I want to see a world where every member of this parliament, not just the people on this side of the chamber but also those on the other, share my passion for environmental protection.

I had a few brief moments of levity when I thought that the opposition was making a leap forward in its views on environmental protection. I thought that it was going to reverse its long-held tactic of using environmental issues for nothing other than short-term political gain, with no genuine desire to deliver any real environmental outcomes.

The challenges that our planet faces because of global warming and climate change are genuinely momentous and we need to put aside partisan differences when seeking solutions. I was genuinely prepared to give the opposition the benefit of the doubt. I was prepared to study the bill and I hoped that we would find some common ground on these very important issues.

I have studied the member for Moggill's private member's bill in detail. I have read it from cover to cover a number of times. With all the goodwill I can muster I can say that the Voluntary Carbon Trading Credit Bill 2007 is the same old shabby Liberal Party drivel that we have been presented with on environmental issues for the entire time that I have been in this parliament. It offers no genuine solution to our planet's problems. Let me explain what I mean.

The nature of carbon trading is such that it provides an economic incentive to business to reduce its production of greenhouse gases which are destroying our planet. I would imagine the member for Moggill knows this because we are told on a regular basis that he is a doctor. Business that reduces its emissions can, in theory, trade its excess carbon credits—so businesses have done the right thing; they have reduced their emissions and they can trade for money their left over carbon credits with businesses that either have not done the right thing or have not reduced their production of greenhouse gases at a fast

enough rate. Hence, there is an economic incentive for businesses to do the right thing. This is precisely what the European community has done. So it is in the interests of all businesses to reduce greenhouse gas production, and of course it is in the interest of the entire planet.

The Europeans have done this with a view to satisfying their obligations to the Kyoto protocol. What they have done is incredibly straightforward and I think genuinely simple. They provide an amount of carbon credit to each county and they work out within that what the businesses within the country are allowed to produce over time so that they can comply with their obligations under Kyoto. What they actually need to do is decrease the amount of credit provided per annum to businesses, so over time businesses must get more and more environmentally efficient. It is pretty straightforward.

The fundamental problem with the member for Moggill's bill is that it is voluntary. So it proposes a voluntary situation where a business would buy in and then trade with other businesses. Why in the name of God would a business trade its carbon credits with other businesses when in the voluntary scheme it can just go out and buy more carbon credits from other places? It is not compulsory, so there is nothing to stop business from doing what I have in fact done during the contribution of the member for Capalaba. Using the member for Sandgate's computer, I logged on to a web site of a lovely bunch of people called Easy Being Green and I have paid a sum of money through the computer to cover my home's carbon emissions. I found out about this particular company through a great bunch of people. It is a little company based in Brighton. Is that right, member for Sandgate?

Ms Darling: It is based in Brighton.

Mr LEE: It is based in Brighton—the Natural Painting People.

Ms Darling: Steve and Georgia Williams.

Mr LEE: They are constituents of the member for Sandgate. I thought they quite cleverly and quite innovatively sent the member for Sandgate a beautiful card—

Ms Darling: With the bill.

Mr LEE: With the bill for her painting. They noticed she had a dog and they also noted that dogs are a contributor, as human beings are, to greenhouse gases. They have paid a sum of money so that the member for Sandgate's dog is now carbon neutral.

Ms Darling: Crystal is carbon neutral.

Mr LEE: Crystal is crystal clear and carbon neutral. It is a great deal. But the fundamental problem with the member for Moggill's speech is that there is no incentive for business to do the right thing economically other than the worthwhile warm inner glow that they get for making sure that their business is in fact in some way contributing to a situation where they are carbon neutral. It is a moral obligation on their part.

While I think becoming carbon neutral is an admirable thing for business to do, if we genuinely want to use an economic incentive for business to ensure that they are carbon neutral or that they do the right thing and that we can comply with Kyoto, then we would do what many members in this place suggest—that is, make the situation compulsory. Right now, today, there is nothing to stop any business in this state doing for their business what I have done for my home and what the member for Sandgate's painters have done for her dog. They can go out and pay a sum of money and make sure that they invest in a carbon sink, that they are doing the right thing and that their business is carbon neutral. The member for Moggill just wants to stand up here and pontificate, rant and rave and pretend that the Liberal Party has actually turned a corner on environmental issues.

Let me tell you about the Liberal Party, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a party that is in government federally and will not sign the Kyoto protocol. It is a disgrace. It is a national disgrace and it is an international disgrace. But members of the Liberal Party want to come in here and say that they have this great idea, that if they introduce this bill into parliament business will go out there and spend their money—money that they have not spent prior to the bill being introduced in the parliament—because the member for Moggill suggests it. This is a fellow who is in enough trouble controlling the seven members of his backbench, yet he is going to tell every business in the state that they should voluntarily be part of a scheme where their business will be carbon neutral.

I say to the member for Moggill quite genuinely that, if he wants to be serious about the environment, he should get John Howard to stop equivocating about the environment, Kyoto and everything else. He should get John Howard to follow Kevin Rudd's lead and commit, like Kevin Rudd and the Labor Party has, to signing the Kyoto protocol. He should get on board with the visionary Labor states that are doing the right thing and are making sure that there is a genuine system of carbon trading in Australia. That is what the member ought to do.

While he is doing that, he should have a word with the member for Burdekin and the member for Toowoomba South, who came in here and, with their coded view of climate change and their coded speeches about climate change, sort of implied that there is a bit of doubt about it. There was at one stage,

as they said, eminent scientists who rejected it. What a load of rubbish. There was a time when eminent scientists I imagine were saying that the world was flat. They were wrong. The fact of the matter is that just because someone with a degree says it is true does not mean it is. Climate change is real. The member for Moggill ought to talk to his backbench and make sure that they know it too, and he ought to talk with his federal party leader, John Howard, and get him to sign the Kyoto protocol.