



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Wednesday, 30 May 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 30 May 2012
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Questioner
Speaker Burke, Tony, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (13:00): I would be happy to. I will be back at 4 pm.

Sitting suspended from 13:00 to 16 : 0 1

Mr BURKE: I will respond to some of the issues raised by the member for Lyons before the break, in particular the issues he raised surrounding illegal logging. I have received some information from the minister, which I will provide to the Federation Chamber.

In 2012-13 the government will also implement its regulatory and administrative approaches to illegal logging in response to its election commitment to combat illegal logging and associated trade. At the last election, the coalition also stated in its election policy that it would legislate to prohibit the importation of illegally harvested timber products, but it now appears that they have withdrawn bipartisan support for that.

This is a serious international problem which has significant economic, social and environmental costs. This is not, or at least it should not be, some sort of exclusively leftie issue, as was interjected before. The World Bank has estimated that each and every two seconds an area the size of a football field is harvested by illegal loggers. That is a rate of more than 2½ thousand square metres per second. But the beneficiaries of this illegal activity, by and large, will not be individuals driven to illicit practice by poverty. Again I quote the World Bank, who tell us that large-scale illegal operations are carried out by sophisticated criminal networks. This is an important issue, and it should not have been ridiculed in the way that it was by one of the opposition interjections when we were here previously.

The Australian government has been working assiduously with our trading partners, including all APEC countries, and with domestic wood processors to limit the negative impacts of this trade through the development of the Illegal Logging Prohibition Bill 2011. The bill will complement Australia's international efforts to promote sustainable management of forests globally. We are working to achieve our aims by engaging directly with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region to support international forestry cooperation and Australia's forestry interests. The bill will put Australia at the forefront of global action, along with the United States and the European Union, to combat illegal logging. International engagement is at the heart of the Gillard government's illegal logging policy.

It is a shame that any sensible perspective has been rolled in the Liberal party room. The Liberal Party has now signalled that it is the only party in the Australian parliament that actually wants to stand for illegal logging. In doing so, the Liberal Party is standing side by side with the interests of sophisticated criminal networks—standing for the wealth that is created from the proceeds of crime.

If you go to any timber mill and meet with the contractors, they will all say that they are happy to face fair competition from overseas but that what they do not want to face is competition with criminal networks. They do not want to see Tasmanian jobs being put at risk because they cannot compete with illegal logging operations bringing their product in to compete side by side with Australian product. Anyone who has a skerrick of support for timber communities in Australia and any interest in a viable domestic industry has to stand opposed to the importation of illegally logged timber.

The member for Lyons also referred to the issues currently surrounding the intergovernmental agreement in Tasmania. Make no mistake: while there may be members opposite who believe that social licence does not matter, or that there is no need for any restructuring of an industry, you will not hear the industry in Tasmania saying that. The industry in Tasmania knows that it is going through an extremely difficult period of change, and no matter how many times the opposition stands up and says it would tear up any support, that it would tear up any assistance and that it would tear up an agreement, we will continue to stand side by side with a lasting outcome for Tasmania.