



05 Dec 2015

Weekend Australian, Australia

Author: Graham Lloyd • Section: General News • Article type : News Item
Classification : National • Audience : 225,206 • Page: 2 • Printed Size: 279.00cm²
Market: National • Country: Australia • ASR: AUD 9,111 • Words: 622
Item ID: 507329103

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Australian Government
Department of the Environment

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Rainforest plan grows on Paris

EXCLUSIVE

GRAHAM LLOYD

PARIS

A global rainforest plan to prevent billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, promote indigenous opportunity and protect the environment will be unveiled by the Turnbull government in Paris today.

The Australian initiative for a global text on rainforests will be launched at the Global Landscape Forum, one of the world's major gatherings on sustainable development. The forum is a sideline event of the Paris climate change conference, which is moving into a crucial stage of negotiations, with deep divisions existing between

developed and developing countries over finance and historical responsibility for carbon dioxide emissions.

France is under pressure to secure a draft text this weekend that is capable of being turned into a lasting global agreement during formal negotiations next week.

Environment Minister Greg Hunt said support for the Australian text reflected a shift at the Paris talks to embrace Direct Action-style solutions.

"In previous conferences it (forest protection) has sort of been shunned as if it was cheating," he said. "But now there is a sense that the goal is to limit what goes up and maximise what comes down."

Over the past week, attention in Paris has moved to a joint private-public initiative on re-

search and innovation announced by Microsoft founder Bill Gates and US President Barack Obama.

Former Irish president Mary Robinson has chaired a major session on global forests and the future of a special fund, REDD plus, to promote investment.

And international finance leaders have marked environmental investment with social

benefits as "the next big thing".

France, Britain and Norway have joined Australia's rainforest initiative, which also includes Brazil, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia.

Mr Hunt said the World Bank and the board of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature had also pledged support for a text that expands on Australia's efforts in the Asia-Pacific and

complements existing forest proposals backed by international figures such as Prince Charles.

Mr Hunt said the loss of forest cover globally represented about four billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions a year. Australia has identified an opportunity for a further one billion tonnes of emissions savings a year from expanding the traditional savanna-burning techniques.

Mr Hunt will announce the rainforest initiative today at the closing session of the Global Landscape Forum. He said yesterday that the government would engage multinational companies, such as South32 and BHP Billiton, private financiers and leading conservation groups to promote "a billion-tonne initiative" involving traditional fire management.

Kimberly Land Council elder Nolan Hunter will address the forum with Australian merchant banker and Credit Suisse managing director Mark Burrows.

Mr Burrows told *The Weekend Australian* valuing natural capital was "the next big thing".

"Investors are looking for investments that are socially conscious," Mr Burrows said. "It is a terrific opportunity to access large private wealth managers around the world."

A draft text prepared by Australia for the rainforest initiative reads: "Rainforests play an essential role in the long-term health of the planet. Community, private sector and political will is building to find better ways to maximise the economic, social and environ-

mental benefits of rainforests, and

to slow, halt and reverse deforestation, while enhancing food security for all."

The draft text says the world is still losing the equivalent of 36 football fields of forest every minute. "We need to build our resolve and accelerate our actions to address this urgent problem," it says. "In the Asia-Pacific region, governments have come together under the Asia-Pacific Rainforest Recovery Plan to build on and better harness existing efforts to slow, halt and reverse rainforest loss.

"The plan offers a nimble and agile model for accelerated action by ensuring that rainforest nations' priorities are at the centre of our collective efforts."

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