



Alliance of Leading Environmental Researchers & Thinkers

*--For immediate release--*

## **Scientists: Tony Abbot's 'no more parks' vow a bad move**

An international scientific group has decried Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott's recent 'no more parks' pledge, saying it is badly out of step with environmental reality.

"Tony Abbott has blown it with that call," said William Laurance, a professor at James Cook University and director of ALERT, the Alliance of Leading Environmental Researchers and Thinkers.

"Australia has some of the world's most desperately endangered ecosystems and species, which direly need better protection," said Laurance. "Just 7.7 percent of the continent is in national parks—that's low by international standards."

"It really is worrying," said Thomas Lovejoy, a renowned ecologist and former environmental advisor to three U.S. presidents. "I hope the Prime Minister gets better advice in the future because the world really needs Australia's leadership on the environment."

As an example, the scientists cite the mountain ash forests of Victoria, which have been devastated by over-logging and fires, with just 1.2% of the old-growth forest remaining.

"The Leadbeater's possum relies entirely on these old-growth forests and is critically endangered," said Corey Bradshaw, a professor at the University of Adelaide. "There's a dire need to create a new national park for this iconic species and ecosystem."

The scientists emphasize that Australia is still losing its biodiversity. "Smaller mammals are disappearing across much of northern Australia," said Bradshaw, "with over-grazing, intense fires and feral cats and cane toads being the likely culprits."

The scientists say the Prime Minister's actions will hurt Australia's reputation. "Australia is hosting the World Park Congress this year," said Laurance. "If a relatively wealthy country like Australia won't protect its environment, what kind of message does that send globally?"

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