

The logo for the Carbon Farming & Trading Association features the text "Carbon Farming & Trading Association" centered within a double-lined oval. The inner line is blue and the outer line is orange. Arrows at the top and bottom of the oval point towards each other.

Carbon Farming & Trading Association

Dr Brian Keating

told the senators that ‘current research would suggest the abatement likely to be achieved, in the short term at least, is likely to be modest.’ True. But ‘current research’ does not include findings about the potential of 80% of the techniques used to build soil carbon. “Current research” covers nothing newer than 20 years old. It includes conventional, carbon mining practices, but not grazing management, pasture cropping, compost teas, biological inoculants, exhaust burial, Natural Sequence Farming – or the combinations of these techniques. “Current research”, the CSIRO will agree, is not very current.

Dr Keating neglected to tell the Committee that the CSIRO is in no position to comment on the potential of farmlands to store carbon because it chose not to study the performance of most modern practices. Instead it invested the \$26.5m Soil Carbon Research Project money in studying conventional practices that are unlikely to qualify as offsets because of the Additionality principle called “Common Practice”. Dr Jeff Baldock, who leads the Project, has admitted that it covers only 20% of the relevant practices.(1)

Not all scientists think ‘current research’ is so negative about soil sequestration. In its submission to the Senate Inquiry, the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists used Brian Keating’s own work to paint a very different picture: “CSIRO has estimated the biophysical potential of the Australian landscape to store carbon.(2) Whilst only a proportion of the total potential is practically achievable and will take time to build the capacity for it to take effect, if Australia were to capture 15% of the biophysical potential of our

landscape to store carbon, it would offset the equivalent of 25% of Australia's current annual greenhouse gas emissions for the next 40 years.(3)”

The fact that Dr Keating has been appointed as a gatekeeper of the Carbon Offsets system as a member of the Government's expert panel for judging methodologies – the Domestic Offsets Integrity Committee (DOIC) – [REDACTED]. It would appear to be inappropriate and compromising to engage in the debate surrounding soil carbon.

This incident is only the latest outbreak of anti-soil carbon activity from the CSIRO, which includes the Soil Carbon Mythbusters national tour, the notorious “Hidden Cost of Soil Carbon Sequestration” scientific [REDACTED] paper, and the announcement that there is ‘a virtual consensus among soil scientists’ that farmers should not be paid to grow soil carbon levels(4).

“Modern carbon farming is low input. It does not rely on expensive chemicals or genetic materials owned by foreign corporations who sponsor CSIRO research. It is understandable that the market-based co-funding model chosen by government has had this outcome. We don't expect the CSIRO to bite the hand that feeds it. [REDACTED]” says Michael Kiely, chairman, Carbon Farming & Trading Association.

1. Personal communication, October 2010.
2. CSIRO, 2009. Analysis of greenhouse gas mitigation and carbon biosequestration from rural land use. Edited by Sandra Eady, Mike Grundy, Michael Battaglia and Brian Keating for the Queensland Premiers Climate Change Council.
3. Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, 2009. Optimising carbon in the Australian landscape: How to guide the terrestrial carbon market to deliver multiple economic and environmental benefits. October 2009.
4. ECOS, September 2010.

Sydney Morning Herald 21 April 2011: "While forest carbon and soil carbon sinks are opportunities worth pursuing, current research would suggest the abatement likely to be achieved, in the short-term at least, is likely to be modest," Dr Keating told a Senate environment committee examining the CFI.