

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE
Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio
Department of Climate Change
Budget Estimates Hearing—May 2009

Written question reference: CC16

Outcome/Output: Outcome 1, Output Group 1.1 – Response to climate change

Topic: Greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation

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Question: (Senator BOB BROWN)

Senator BOB BROWN—How do you know the total if you do not know the component? Let me put this question specifically to you. It is established by other observers, presumably, that in Tasmania, for example, regeneration forest burns produce more greenhouse gases than the rest of the Tasmanian economy put together, including its transport system. Are you aware of those figures? If you are not, how do you measure the volume of greenhouse gases coming out of deforestation if you do not know what the figure is for deforestation followed by replantation or regrowth?

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Senator BOB BROWN—I put it on notice that you provide the committee with the work and the information that you do have on that.

Answer:

Australia reports detailed national greenhouse gas accounts under provisions of both the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Government also prepares subordinate greenhouse gas emissions estimates for the states and territories based on the national Kyoto Protocol account. Greenhouse gas emissions for Tasmania in 2007 totalled 8.5 million tonnes (Mt) of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂-e).

Deforestation is described as the deliberate human-induced conversion of forest to an alternative land use. Deforestation emissions are estimated using the National Carbon Accounting System (NCAS) and are reported in both the Kyoto Protocol and UNFCCC accounts. The NCAS incorporates remote sensing of land cover change, which allows production of spatially explicit deforestation emissions estimates that can be reported at state or other regional scales.

Deforestation emissions in 2007 were estimated at 77.1 Mt CO₂-e nationally and 2.4 Mt CO₂-e in Tasmania (with these accounts including any regrowth on deforested lands). Deforestation reporting does not include the conversion of native forest to another forest type or harvest of native forest, and therefore these forest activities are not represented in the Tasmanian Kyoto Protocol inventory.

Under the UNFCCC national inventories, the Government reports national emissions for Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry that include native forests converted to plantations and native forests that are harvested. These forest emissions are reported under the inventory category of Forest land remaining Forest land. Emissions due to fires in forests are also reported under this category. Reporting of emissions from fires does not identify a separate component on regeneration forest burns.

These UNFCCC Forest land remaining Forest land accounts are based on generalised methodologies and national level statistics (not the spatially detailed NCAS) of the type commonly employed in other countries. Consequently, the UNFCCC National Greenhouse Gas Inventory at this time does not contain emissions estimates for specific forest sub-components like regeneration forest burns, nor does it provide state-by-state representation of forests.

The development of the NCAS has progressed as quickly as available resources have allowed to provide fully detailed representation of the emissions and sinks associated with forest management practices on a spatially explicit basis.