

The Secretary
Senate Economics Legislation Committee
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Inquiry into the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment Bill 2009 and a related bill

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Regarding the inclusion of native forest wood “waste” as a renewable energy, subject to the current MRET restrictions; it is stated that no legislative amendments are required, however whilst technically this can be described as “no change,” in practice it would mean a very significant change, as it would override current state bans in NSW and Victoria, as recognized in the COAG Options Paper 2008.

This submission covers the big question: can native forest ‘waste’ be classified as suitable for renewable energy (electricity)? Are native forests, using logging regimes that produce this ‘waste’, renewable? Is this use of forests ecologically sustainable, accorded full scientific investigation and economically and socially sound? When 35% of atmospheric carbon comes from deforestation and degradation can we afford to continue to degrade our forests, especially in the most carbon dense, Australia’s southeast forests, where 80- 90% of logs are used for woodchips now and which could be burnt in forest furnaces as ‘waste’ from saw logs? Is this really valuing the natural, native forests so critical to climate stability?

1/ Definition of renewable:

Is the supply of the source of native forest ‘waste’ renewable? In other words, are native forests renewable? Given that it takes 80 years to recover carbon and return water catchments to pre-logged status and 200 years to form the hollows for high order birds and animals, such as gliders need, in the complex bio-diversity that is a natural forest, then, no!

‘In nature there is no waste’

Natural eco-systems recycle everything; logging native forests degrades them: soil carbon, water, nutrients, essential fungi, bacterium for making rain and complex orders of species which evolved over millions of years are lost; we know so little about Australia’s forest ecology and scientific research has next to no funding.

2/ Ecologically sustainable as required under the 2000 Renewable Energy Act does not allow the excuse of no scientific certainty and includes the integrity of the environment and conservation of bio-diversity. Because there is currently little impartial scientific research and Regional Forest Agreements Reviews are overdue, up to 5 five years in NSW, there is no certainty of sustainability.

Take a walk in our State controlled forests: use your eyes, ears and feet and common sense will also tell you things are crook in the bush and getting crooker as the south of the continent heats up and dries out.

3/ Economics: is it sustainable and sensible to allow companies to invest in electricity projects when the supply side does not stack up? President Obama has flagged \$30.00 per tonne for carbon from living carbon sequestration (unlike the Rudd Government’s current CPRS.) Our carbon-dense native forests now are logged primarily for woodchips; 71% of the Eden chip mill’s proposed source of manufacturing waste would need to come from one million tonnes per annum of low value chips which it is not currently maintaining .

Around 7% of Australia’s green house gases come from logging native forests using industrial scale techniques and burning off. None of this is likely to change because of costs of collecting waste left on the ground after logging is high.

What is the real cost of logging native forests, currently a 'free' resource?

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- + Council rates, taxes, roads
- + State Forests losing money supplying chip logs; NSW says this is to maintain jobs.
- + Water supplies: e.g., around 10% of Melbourne's water supply is foregone by logging the Thompson catchment; replacement costs include billions to build a desalination plant.
- + Rainfall: forests make rain, any old farmer will tell you that remove trees and the rain goes. Science now backs this up.
- + 5-7% of Australia's GHG emissions that could be sequestered, annually.
- + Tourism from the Indo-Asian regions is expected to grow exponentially by the end of this century as their growing middle classes travel to see this unique and ancient continent, in our care.
- + The beauty of bio-diversity, on which we currently place no value, is essential for the continuing evolution of life on this planet.
- + Fire: re-growth forests are drier and are more fire prone than natural forests.

= too high

Native forests are more valuable left in the ground, with only careful logging for feature grade timber; less carbon-dense plantations would provide a more economical source of fuel.

4/ **Social consequences and responsibilities:** can we afford to maintain a few hundred jobs in a dying industry, such as native forestry, which has largely been replaced by plentiful hard and soft wood plantations, due to the successful taxation initiatives designed for this purpose? Only 1% of logs are used for feature grade products with the balance as 'waste' and low value uses such as palettes and tomato stakes, with 80-90% used for cheap woodchips for copy paper.

The timber and fiber industries are moving to efficient plantations; new jobs will be in maintaining the carbon, water and ecological values of forests for a low carbon future and for recreation.

In conclusion: native forest 'waste' is not a renewable electricity source because native forests are not renewable in any reasonable time frame.

This source of fuel is not economical given the real values of resilient forests as natural eco-systems that produce oxygen and rain, store carbon, hold precious water and a unique range of species: from soil bacteria to gliders, parrots, bats, koala; the list goes on; and natural forests continue to evolve and adapt to an ever-changing climate.

Propping up failing native forest jobs with a new use for the massive waste from current industrialized logging methods, supposedly for saw logs, actually stops necessary change to a truly low carbon future.

I remind the Senate that around 80% of Australians do not approve of woodchipping native forests, let alone burning them as fuel whether labeled as 'waste' or not; if this contentious part of the legislation is passed, public action will inevitably result.

Natural forests are essential to life, as we know it; fossil fuel reduction and renewable energy initiatives alone cannot re-balance the atmosphere and keep the planet cool, without healthy forests.