

LEAMAN GEOPHYSICS

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July 13, 2008

The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional and Transport Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

RE: INQUIRY INTO IMPLEMENTATION, OPERATION AND ADMINISTRATION
OF LEGISLATION UNDERPINNING CARBON SINK FORESTS

Dear Sir,

It is quite incredible to find that two governments (the Howard ex government, the current Rudd Government) could be so stupid as to propose carbon sink legislation/regulation involving trees/forests without a careful review of consequences and implications – and not just for any supposed long term carbon benefit, presuming that the trees actually grow old. Trees are part of a cycle and can never permanently fix anything above a certain level. This is the stuff of delusions. That said, may I draw the Committee's attention first to two previous Inquiries published in 2004 (Rural water resource usage; Australian forest plantations) which demonstrate the absolute silliness of what is now proposed.

In the present circumstance of climate panic and paranoia – where we are facing great change (but have been ignoring the reality for the last thirty years since the trends became evident), and where we actively release carbon and have cleared or transformed much land with increasing population (Australian and global) – there are two far more pressing and critical factors: food supply and water resources. These are directly linked and have immediate ramifications, not some airy-fairy result maybe in 2050.

We have already seen some effects of misplaced climate evangelism and shallow thought. Climates are changing and we will have to live with the results – now, but there is no need to amplify our problems with stupidity. Conversion of food-producing land for biofuels is just one example for which some awareness of mistake-blunder is dawning. The removal of good land, food-producing land, for trees as sinks is plain silly in this same equation. Use dud land if it has to be done at all. Then there is the small matter of water and water resources.

Having spent many years studying catchment behaviour and problems related to climate trends, over allocation, non allocation of certain usage (especially groundwater and tree farms), I cannot believe – with all that is now known and in the public domain – that we can be so dense as to even think we can get away with carbon-for-water proposals: for that is what we are presented with. Can we afford the water? What is more important?

The answer should be obvious.

The country is ruined without water and sensible use of it – something we have yet to perfect.

The Murray-Darling is the best known example. We have proposals whereby we “give back” up to 1500 GL to the system. Great. But, at the same time we are subtracting at least this amount with plantations under reforestation and industry schemes. Result: no net gain and, actually, increasing loss. What about other users? Other needs? All have been overlooked by dreaming about the so-called desirability of reforestation or reduction of salinity problems without proper review of all the linked implications.

This is but one example of left and right hands and blinkered policy. There is now talk, just talk so far, of buying out allocations but what about tree removal? What about food production? Where lies the greater benefit?

The Murray-Darling is just the big name which gets the publicity; the problem is endemic around the country and Tasmania has many “little” Murray-Darlings. All have been produced in the same way: limited understanding, greed and silly policy.

Governments seem to want to persist in providing tax benefits to some (friends, or big players?) without considering the damage or distortions suffered by others and the nation as a whole. Managed investments schemes fall in this category. Where is community equity? Any tax benefit should arise at the termination of a scheme – just as it does for the rest of us: what have we earned, what is our profit, what is our taxable income? We do not get a tax benefit for making a promise: we only get it when the entire accounting is available as proof that we actually did something.

Environmental and reforestation policies are fine in their place and their place clearly needs some regulation and specification.


Those regulations need to take the following form in the case of carbon sinks, reforestation, tree farms etc.

1. Only low quality land classes may be used.
2. Planting may occur only if the catchment has water available which could be allocated long term without collateral damage to existing users (farm, industry, town). Potential time variant water use can be estimated and the estimate used as the allocation value. There is ample scientific literature on this and I can add my own book “Water” and recent paper to “Water down under 2008” as references for management values.
3. Planting must follow a plan, details of which have been subject to public debate and appeal if necessary. That plan must define water implications.
4. Carbon sink forests must remain in place until death.
5. Tax benefits accrued must reflect annual costs, as deductions, only.

These conditions might force some sense and equity into the system without profiteering.

I urge the committee to recommend them to the Parliament in the national interest.

Yours sincerely,


Dr. D. E. Leaman