

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport.

Inquiry into the Implementation, Operation and Administration of the Legislation Underpinning Carbon Sink Forests

Submission by:

Bob Wilson,
Vice Pres of Evergreen Farming Inc
c/o P.O. Box 63
Lancelin WA 6044
(08) 96551055
0417 185592
bobwilson@bordernet.com.au

Following the release of the Green Paper on the ETS it is apparent that soil carbon has not been accepted as having a role to play in reducing Greenhouse gases, because of the perceived difficulties of measurement, variability et al. However, the DCC has accepted that trees are capable of acting as a carbon sink.

By limiting farmer's potential to be paid for sequestering carbon into the soil, but allowing trees to be planted as carbon sinks, we are greatly concerned that large areas of prime agricultural land, currently used for food production, could be taken out of production and planted to trees.

At a time when many organizations, including the UN, are concerned about the issue of food security, it seems counter productive to be encouraging trees to be planted on our prime food producing land.

As recently as July this year, the FAO crisis meeting in Rome urged governments to help the world's farmers to participate in financial mechanisms to support climate change adaptation, to avoid the forced displacement of large populations in search of food.

In a submission to the Senate inquiry into Agriculture and Climate Change, Tim Wiley and Bob Wilson presented data, from a limited number of sites in WA, which had been planted down to either fodder shrubs or perennial grasses. This data indicated that both these farming systems sequestered between 5-10 tonnes of CO₂eq p.a. compared to the Annual-based pasture systems that had been the norm.

Since that submission, results from a further 8 sites in WA have shown results over a similar range.

These very positive results indicate that if farmers change their practices and adopt a more perennial-based farming system, then soils can play a major role in helping Australia (and the world) reduce its GHG emissions.

Of great concern to our group is the recent report from a farmer who has been told by his bank that he has to change a sizeable portion of his farm from food production to a tree plantation, because the tree scheme will pay him enough money 'upfront' to repay what he owes the bank.

We believe that if soil carbon was included on an equal footing with trees, then that farmer could achieve the same outcome, but with perennial grasses and fodder shrubs planted, that would then actually improve his potential to help feed the world, while also sequestering carbon in the soil!

A win for the people who want to continue eating.....

And the nervous bank manager as well!

As Wiley and Wilson stated in their submission to the Senate Inquiry, "The pasture cropping, tagasaste and perennial grass grazing systems were calculated to be net sequestrers of carbon. Consumption of food produced from these two ('carbon farms') would ***help to reduce*** the global warming problem, rather than contributing to it, as is now being widely promoted in the public arena".

The question surely must be, if Australia is to remain in a position of being able to help feed the world in the future, then why restrict farmers who wish to adopt 'carbon farming' techniques, from being able to be rewarded for the carbon they build in the soil, while allowing tax incentives for trees to be planted instead.

Soils have the ability to start sequestering carbon from the atmosphere NOW. As Dr Rattan Lal says "Soils are our bridge to the future". They can do the job for the environment for the next 20 – 30 years while the other technologies begin to take effect.

Instead of slamming the door shut on soil carbon, why not allow it to compete on an equal footing with the Trees Industry, and the market to tell us what sort of role soils will play in a future ETS.