

## **OPEN LETTER TO THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT, Senators and Members**

**We are scientists, researchers and analysts with a direct interest in the management, exploitation and conservation of Australia's native forests.**

**We write to express our sincere opposition to the inclusion of native forest wood as an eligible fuel source for electricity generation under the Renewable Energy Target.**

The inclusion of native forest wood in the RET is being driven in part by the idea that burning native forest wood for electricity production will lower carbon emissions, replace coal and be based on residues left from sawlog production. However, these pressures are misguided and superficial. We ask that you not accept them on face value.

Federal legislation should not allow for the burning of native forests to be termed 'renewable' and included in the government's Renewable Energy Target.

- The claim in early June by Environment Minister Greg Hunt that forest waste is better burnt even if creating CO<sub>2</sub>, than left to rot and produce methane is an extremely ill-informed and concerning statement as part of a Parliamentary speech.
- The definition of 'waste' is a key point and still remains without an adequate answer. Trees cut for pulplogs for paper production are considered 'waste' even when they comprise most of the logs taken from a forest. Australia should not be repeating the mistakes of the past 50 years of supporting a woodchip industry based on this distorted definition of waste.
- There is currently a growing demand in the Asian region for cheap wood pellets to burn in power plants. This gives an incentive to Australian forest industries to provide the resource for overseas use as well. In fact the current situation points to this being the most immediate market and one which would replace the recently collapsed export woodchip industry. If Australia begins to supply this market the demand could be difficult to curtail in the future. It could intensify the industrialisation of native forest management beyond the current practices and cause

irreversible impacts on forest ecosystems.

- Medium to large wood-fired generators are very inefficient and require huge volumes of wood fuel to produce a small amount of energy. Existing forest based biomass power plants in the USA emit at least 50 per cent more CO<sub>2</sub> than coal, for the same energy produced<sup>1</sup>. The 70MW Laidlaw plant in NH USA burns 113 tons of wood an hour. Such demands for feed-stocks cannot be met by the 'waste' materials and residues.
- Greenhouse gas emissions created by forest logging include the loss of soil carbon, the output in the post logging site burn, emissions involved in transporting the materials from forests to processors then to generators and the emissions created by processing logs to a form suitable for a furnace. The additional CO<sub>2</sub> the trees would have absorbed if left to grow should also be part of calculations. Recapturing this carbon loss by regenerating the logged forest takes hundreds of years. This is far longer than the period in which we need to address the serious problem of climate change.<sup>2 3 4</sup>
- Drax, the world's biggest biomass energy plant in the UK, is selling its power for £80 per MW/hr, two-and-a-half times more expensive than coal, but last year received £340 million in 'green' subsidies. Without these subsidies, its biomass operation would collapse.
- Native forests are a critical component to climate mitigation and should be protected and restored as an extremely effective carbon capture and storage tool.
- Offering Renewable Energy Certificates to biomass burners or exporters would rob credits and therefore financial assistance from Australia's true clean green energy alternatives.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pfpi.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/PFPI-Biomass-is-the-New-Coal-April-2-2014.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Logging native forests causes immediate emissions (around 60% of forest carbon in SE NSW forests is lost in logging) that cannot be recovered except over centuries (an estimated 53 years to recover 75%, 152 years to recover 90%).

<sup>3</sup> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1757-1707.2012.01169.x/abstract>

Energy-related subsidies should be spent on measures that reduce carbon emissions and overall energy use, and on genuinely low carbon and sustainable forms or renewable energy.

Using Australia's native forests as fuel at an industrial scale would have long term impacts, ecologically, economically and would be counter-productive to reducing Australia's CO2 levels. At the very least a public inquiry is needed into whether using forests in this way can help reduce CO2 emissions.

We ask you to consider these points carefully and exclude native forest wood 'waste' as a fuel source in the Renewable Energy Target.

Yours sincerely,

1. Professor Peter Gell, Professor of Environmental Science, Federation University Australia
2. Professor David Lindenmayer AO, BSc, DipEd, PhD, DSc, FAA, Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU.
3. Adjunct Professor John R. J. French, USC, Faculty of Science, Health, Education and Engineering, Qld.
4. Don White, Adjunct A Professor, School of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, University of Sydney
5. Dr Greg. P. Clancy, Ecologist, Coutts Crossing, NSW
6. Ian Penna PhD, Honorary Research Fellow, Federation University, Ballarat.
7. Dr Mark Aaron Gregory, PhD, Chemistry, University of Melbourne Vic.
8. Dr Steve Leonard, Department of Ecology, Environment and Evolution, La Trobe University Vic.
9. Linda Selvey, MBBS(Hon), MAppEpi, PhD, FAFPHM, Associate Professor, Director of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University WA.

10. Steve Phillips, B.Sc.(Hons), Ph.D. Managing Director/Principal Ecologist, Biolink Ecological Consultants NSW.
11. Alan Roberts, MSc Solid State Physics Melb University (1967), NSW
12. Mark Graham, B. App. Sc (Env. Res Mngmnt) - collaborator with UNSW, Macquarie, UNE, UTS, SCU.
13. Dr Oisín Sweeney, Science Officer, National Parks Association of NSW .
14. Annette McKinley, M. Litt (Botany), consultant plant ecologist, NSW.
15. Barbara Stewart B.Sc (Hons) Ph D, Consultant plant ecologist, NSW.
16. Lucie Bradley, PhD, Organic chemistry, science communication, Monash University Vic
17. Fiona Sutton, Botanist B.Biol.Sc. (Hons.), Ecology Australia, Vic
18. Dr Peter McQuillan, Honours Programme Coordinator, School of Land and Food, University of Tasmania.
19. Marion Carey, MBBS (Hons) MPH FAFPHM FRSPH, Adjunct Associate Professor (Research), Monash University, Vic.
20. Elaine Bayes BSc (Hons), MSc, ecologist with Rakali Ecological Consulting
21. David Cheal, Assoc. Adj. Professor, Centre for Environmental Management, Faculty of Science & Technology, Federation University, Vic
22. Damien Cook, Principal Ecologist, Rakali Ecological Consulting, Vic.
23. Dr Graeme Lorimer, PhD, F.Airqual, 'Director, Biosphere Pty Ltd' Vic.
24. Bertram Lobert, BSc, MSc, Ecologist & Conservation Coordinator Strathbogie Ranges Conservation Management Network.

25. Michael Calver, Associate Professor in Biological Sciences, School of Veterinary and Life Sciences, Murdoch University.
26. Andy Baker, BSc (Hons), Wildsite Ecological Services.
27. Harry F. Recher, FRZS, AM, Senior Fellow, The Australian Museum.
28. David Milledge MRSc, wildlife ecologist (UNE).
29. Rhonda James, BBus M.EnvMan. Ecologist, Manager, Bushland Restoration Services, NSW
30. Neil Marriott, B Ed. Environmental Consultant, Stawell, Vic.
31. John Kershaw, B.Env.Sc., Dip.Nat.Res.Mgt. Senior Botanist, Ecology Australia Pty Ltd.
32. Keely Ough, Scientist, BSc Hons.
33. Bernard Mace, ARMIT, LIM, GMOO-STS, RSV.
34. Geoffrey William Carr, BSc, Director, Ecology Aust Pty Ltd.
35. Ruth Marr, BSc(Hons), Ecologist, Ecology Australia.
36. Dr Linden Gillbank, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, University of Melbourne.
37. Doug Frood, BSc (Hons), Principle, Pathways Bushland and Environment.
38. Susie Duncan, BSc (Hons), Director, Hinterland Bush Links, SE Qld.
39. Dr Chris belcher, BSc, MSc PhD, Principle Ecosystems Env Consultants Vic
40. Dr Heather Keith, Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU.