

The Safe Climate (Green Carbon) Bills

The Greens will have two Safe Climate Bills addressing 'Green Carbon' - that is carbon stored in forests and the soil.

The first, the *Safe Climate (Native Forest Carbon and Biodiversity Protection) Bill 2009* is aimed at securing existing stores of carbon in standing forests.

The second, the *Safe Climate (Green Carbon) Bill* will deal with the vexed problem of creating an incentive for new carbon sequestration, including in reforestation and soil carbon projects, while at the same time managing potentially significant adverse ecological and social impacts. (See fact sheet on that bill)

Safe Climate (Native Forest Carbon and Biodiversity Protection) Bill 2009

Australia is failing to protect our forest carbon stores. This bill will turn that around.

Standing forests, especially old growth forests, store huge quantities of carbon both above and below ground – carbon that has been accumulated over very long periods of time. When the forests are harvested, most of this carbon is quickly lost to the atmosphere. This is particularly true of native forest harvesting because the vast bulk of wood is chipped to make paper. Even when long lived products such as furniture are produced, this represents no more than a few percent of the forest harvested. Regrowing forests take decades, often centuries, to recoup most of the lost carbon. As a result, forests harvested on a rotational basis contain much less carbon than natural forests.

Emissions resulting from harvesting natural forests are currently ignored by the national greenhouse gas inventory, provided that no land-use conversion takes place – in other words, if we still define the logged forest as forest, not grazing land, we do not count any emissions from the logging process. This definitional trick is justified by assuming that sequestration resulting from re-growth offsets the emissions resulting from harvesting. However, this is only true over the very long term and masks the fact that the cessation of harvesting would shift the balance such that native forests would represent a very large carbon sink for many decades.

Time is critical, and the atmosphere doesn't care whether or not these emissions appear on the balance sheets of nations – we are causing that carbon to be emitted whether we count it or not.

One potential solution to this problem would be to ensure that forest owners were liable for emissions resulting from harvesting (the carbon costs would render native forest harvesting unviable). However, the Government has not yet developed a methodology to accurately assess the gains and losses of carbon in native forests and probably will not resolve this for many years. Until such a time as accurate measurement is available, including logging in a carbon pricing scheme will not be possible.

The solution:

The solution, and the purpose of the *Safe Climate (Native Forest Carbon and Biodiversity Protection) Bill 2009*, is to regulate to immediately stop the harvest of the most carbon and biodiversity rich high conservation value native forests and then to phase out within two years the export of native forest woodchips to preserve the rest of our native forests.

Australia's woodchip industry should be based on plantations and the Government's own data demonstrate that will be possible within the next 1-2 years – indeed Australia is about to face a problematic glut of plantation because of a supply rather than demand driven government strategy. Ending the export of woodchips from native forest, as well as prohibiting the burning of forests for biomass or heating would virtually end native forest logging in Australia because plantations can meet the bulk of sawlog demand.

Ending native forest logging in Australia will also mean that the Australian Government can legitimately argue that developing countries, particularly Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, should also restrain their native forest harvesting. As it stands the Rudd Government's position is breathtakingly hypocritical.

In summary the *Safe Climate (Native Forest Carbon and Biodiversity Protection) Bill 2009*:

- Immediately protects high conservation value native forest and bans further forest conversion (ie the conversion of land that was forest in 1990 and has remained so since, to land used for grazing, cropping or plantations).
- Phases out the export of native forest wood chips over 2 years and bans the use of native forest products in domestic pulp mills or for generation of electricity or heat.
- Requires the Minister to develop a transition strategy to assist the native forest logging industry to shift its operations to plantation sources within two years, noting especially that hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent over the past decade in expanding the plantation estate and in assisting the transition of the industry out of native forests.