

Submission on Biomass Burning of Native Forests in the Emissions Reduction Fund

By Dr Jennifer Sanger

On Behalf of The Tree Projects and The Tasmanian Climate Collective

We believe that native forest biomass should not be included in the Emissions Reduction Fund as it is a highly polluting form of energy that is not renewable over the short term. We also believe that it may accelerate native forest logging which would have a detrimental effect on our forests and the threatened species that rely on them.

Using native forests for biomass burning is a carbon intensive way for generating electricity. Scientific research has shown that generating electricity from wood biomass has approximately 50% more CO₂ emissions than burning coal (Booth, 2018). This is not a climate friendly solution.

Furthermore, while forests do regrow after logging, it can take many decades for the regrowing forest to capture the amount of carbon that was originally lost. The next decade is extremely important for reducing our emissions. Burning native forests for energy releases emissions immediately and we simply can not wait 50 or more years for these emissions to be recaptured by the regrowing forests.

One of the greatest concerns is that using native forests for biomass burning will accelerate the industrial scale logging of our forests. The biomass burning is not necessarily a way of dealing with the waste, it could end up driving native forest logging just like the wood chip industry was a way of dealing with waste many decades ago. The woodchip industry has been the main driver for native forest logging in south-eastern Australia and has been responsible for the destruction of hundreds of thousands of hectares of our forests.

The fact is that the acceleration of native forest logging would be absolutely detrimental for climate change. Native forest logging is a huge emitter of carbon. I have released two reports on this issue this year. The first was an evaluation on the emissions from native forest logging in Tasmania, where I found that it was the highest emitting sector in the state. Just recently, I have released a report that has found that native forest logging in Victoria emits over 3 million tonnes of carbon per year. The inclusion of biomass burning into the Emissions Reduction Fund would only accelerate native forest logging which would increase emissions from this sector.

The Federal Labor Government has recently committed to 'no new extinctions' which is an admirable goal. Many of our threatened species are forest-dependent species, such as the Swift Parrot, Koala and Greater Glider. The greatest threat to these species is habitat loss, which is largely driven by native forest logging. In order to protect these species, we need to be protecting our forests, not cutting them down to generate electricity.

We desperately need urgent action on climate change. The best use for our forests is to protect them and let them continue to store carbon and draw more down from the atmosphere. If protected instead of logged, production forests in Tasmania could draw down 75 million tonnes of carbon by 2050. Meanwhile, Victoria's forests could draw down 90 million tonnes of carbon by 2050 if logging was halted. These are significant amounts that could allow Australia to reach its net zero targets quicker.

We respect that the Labor Government is showing integrity by sticking to its commitments. It is a important reminder that the Labor Government stated in the Climate Change Authority's Renewable Energy Target (RET) Review in March 2013 that:

"Wood waste from native forests was removed from the RET as an eligible renewable energy source in 2011. This amendment was made to ensure that the RET did not provide an incentive for the burning of native forest wood waste for bio-energy, which could lead to unintended outcomes for biodiversity and the destruction of intact carbon stores."

Furthermore, Anthony Albanese and Mark Butler have been quoted during speeches saying that *"native forest wood waste is neither clean nor renewable"*. This is the absolute truth. Burning native forests for biomass has high emissions that would take decades to recover. This is not the climate solution that we need. We need further investment in true renewable solutions such as solar and wind.

Protecting our forests is real action on climate change. It also secures the future for our native species. By protecting our forests we can address both the climate and extinction crisis.

Thank you for your time.

Best Wishes,

Dr Jennifer Sanger
0423 008 166
thetreeprojects@gmail.com

On behalf of The Tree Projects and The Tasmanian Climate Collective

The Tree Projects is an environmental outreach organisation that aims to educate people about the importance of trees and forests. Our aim is to communicate the science of the natural world in an accessible way.

The Tasmanian Climate Collective connects groups and individuals to encourage, promote and initiate climate action across lutruwita/Tasmania through cooperation, influence and knowledge sharing.