



Submission on FIAC Strategic Directions Paper

5-Jun-15

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute. We look forward to beneficial discussions with this proud industry, which was founded on a history of forest conservation. We would like to start by raising three strategic issues:

A. FORESTERS, CARBON & SOCIAL LICENSE

“You Foresters have a problem” was the plaintive message from a senior student advisor at ANU, addressing ANU Forestry School staff a few years ago. “When I suggest to fresh-faced new students that they consider enrolling in Forestry, they react as if I had suggested they join Al Qaeda!”

21st Century ‘Old Growth’ logging is killing the public image of the once proud forestry profession. High-conservation-value forests are being logged for low-value woodchips. Australia’s wonderful wildlife is dying-out due to lack of old-growth tree ‘hollows’. Yet ample ‘good wood’ is coming from plantations.

The world is embracing forest carbon as one ‘natural solution’ to climate change. Sequestration ‘carbon credits’ for the next century of re-growth in State Forests are there for the taking. Yet the massive ‘up-front pulse’ of avoidable carbon pollution/emissions from logging and burning Australia’s Government-controlled high-conservation-value/carbon-dense State Forests is not being measured! Why not?

Are emissions from legal logging in some State Forests worse than illegal logging in PNG & Indonesia?

B. ‘EVIDENCE-BASED’ DECISION MAKING

Global carbon market standards like Gold Standard are complemented by the Government’s own Forest ‘Methods’ evolving under the Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF). Emissions from logging and burning carbon-dense State Forests under RFAs are not even measured. Environment Minister Greg Hunt says there are “further methods under development”. If we don’t measure it, we can’t manage it! We can sensibly evaluate Forest land-use options once we have honest carbon emissions reporting.

C. LEVEL PLAYING FIELD?

Private plantations are ‘undercut’ by State Forests, which enjoy tax, subsidy and market advantages. Governments (both Labor & Liberal) also promote State Forest woodchip exports from subsidized State Forests, in competition with third -world plantations managed sustainably by poor people in South East Asian villages. Make you proud?

We asked one ‘Markets for Change’ forest conservation advocate if there was a language problem exposing unsustainably logged forest products when talking to State Forest export customers in foreign countries. “No language problem.” he replied “We just show them the pictures”.

Geoff Edwards, retired Agricultural Economist for the Productivity Commission offered a few points:

1. “There is something of an out-dated “exports good, imports bad” flavour to the paper. This is at odds with the present day approach of providing a level playing field, and not propping up individual industries.
2. “There is unquestioning acceptance that obtaining “maximum yields” from forests is a desirable thing. In forestry, as in agriculture, yields can usually be increased by more intensive management. But adopting more intensive management (more fertiliser, more irrigation, greater efforts to control pests and diseases) has costs: it is only worth incurring these costs, and increasing yields, if the extra costs are less than the extra benefits. That is, the sensible objective is ‘optimal’ yields, not ‘maximum’ yields.
3. “In discussing potential biofuel from forest resources, it is said that the most obvious source material is residues, such as sawdust and off-cuts. I saw no mention of the ‘carbon-life-cycle’ question that needs to be addressed in considering whether it is reasonable to include energy from ‘whole-log’ forest biofuels in the RET.

We look forward to a profitable and ecologically sustainable Forest Industry which Australia can be proud of.

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