

Letter to the Editor Weekly Times Prue Acton 17.10.2010

Time to stop "dead koala" woodchips

With a Tasmanian forest solution close, the long fight to keep industrial scale logging, mainly for woodchips, is moving to Victoria and NSW, according to your editorial, "THE logging industry is split over the clear-felling of native forest".

After 40 years of woodchipping southeast native forests, the market has moved to plantations and recycling for timber, paper and fibre products. Forestry interests are urgently looking for an exit plan and an alternative market such as burning native forests for electricity.

Nippon Paper, which owns Maryvale chipmill, Australian Paper, Reflex, Spicers, the Eden chip mill (SEFE) and a large hardwood plantation estate, is now the biggest native forest woodchip producer in Australia.

The Nippon Paper owned Eden chip mill has applied to the NSW Planning Minister for approval to build the first wood-fired power plant at Eden. Forestry interests are watching this test case for industrial scale woody biomass power.

This would use 70-100% native forest wood "waste" from important habitat for vulnerable koalas and other wildlife, in Victoria and NSW. Conservationists fear that native forest wood fired electricity generation will lead to more intensive logging of tree species favoured by the koala, whose numbers are in sharp decline in SE NSW. Some koala favourites are not currently taken for woodchips because they are either too hard or too red to be suitable, but this could change once burning becomes an economically viable option.

Considered as "the test case", thousands of responses against this industrial scale biomass facility have been received by the NSW Planning Minister. Conservationists are also protesting against Nippon Paper establishing native forest wood-burning power plants in the USA.

Under new Federal legislation, passed by Labor and Liberals, native forest so called "waste" is now eligible for Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) and will compete unfairly against true renewables: wind and solar and wave. NAFI wants this changed to burn whole trees.

Burning native forests for electricity will produce several times more emissions than dirty coal-fired power when full carbon accounting is applied. Scientists around the world have spoken out about the pollution and CO2 emissions from wood-burning power stations, especially from native forests.

Despite producing 7-9% of Australia's carbon emissions, logging native forests does not have to be counted under United Nation forestry rules. Already Australia is shipping these woodchips overseas to burn as "renewable" energy.

Known in the trade, as "dead koala power", electricity retailers are refusing to purchase native forest sourced electricity.

Will the forestry industry wake up and recognize the market has moved to plantations, and leave our beautiful native forests, essential for the climate, water and wildlife for future generations, to enjoy.

Please ask your politicians the same question.

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