

## Forests to the rescue on climate

*Matthew Franklin and Siobhain Ryan | The Australian September 04, 2008*

KEVIN Rudd will be asked to dramatically lift Australia's reserves of natural forests and grasslands as part of its climate change solution in a bid to ease emissions cuts on industry as part of the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The Prime Minister's climate change adviser, Ross Garnaut, yesterday urged Australia to lift its focus on retaining natural forests and grasslands in northern Australia as part of its climate change response.

The Australian understands the concept of boosting biosequestration has the support of senior government figures, particularly given its potential to reduce the impact on industry of the Government's carbon reduction measures.

Professor Garnaut said Australia was uniquely placed to use biosequestration to soak up carbon emissions, with its northern savannahs likely to continue to receive good rainfall despite the effects of climate change.

His comments to the International Conference on Climate Change and Food Security Issues in Canberra yesterday will refocus debate from reducing emissions from polluting industries towards soaking up greenhouse gases through forestry and native vegetation.

In Canberra tomorrow, Professor Garnaut will release a key report on the targets and trajectories for carbon emission reductions that the nation must achieve to alleviate climate change. The focus on natural sequestration techniques could reduce the impact of the new emissions trading regime.

"We are, of the OECD countries, probably the country in the world with the largest area of woodlands and forest per capita and this vast area is going to provide very large potential for biosequestration of many kinds," Professor Garnaut said.

"That will leave opportunity for intensification for growth of biomass in northern Australia."

Opposition Treasury spokesman Malcolm Turnbull, who was environment minister in the Howard government, said there was massive potential for biosequestration.

"One of the reasons we promoted the carbon-sink-forest tax deductibility was because there are vast areas of Australia where there's the opportunity to reforest areas, often with trees that have virtually no value from a timber point of view such as mallee, (but) are very effective in storing carbon," Mr Turnbull said last night.

"It isn't unrealistic and it doesn't involve new or revolutionary technology.

"And for those people that are anxious about climate science, it is an absolutely no-regret policy because nobody could argue that there aren't numerous environmental benefits in stopping the deforestation of the world's rainforests."

Mr Turnbull said biosequestration was the reason the previous government proposed financial support for Indonesia to stamp out illegal logging and preserve its forests.

The Rudd Government had "taken up our idea, changed the name and presented it as their own idea", Mr Turnbull said.

An Australian National University study released last month highlighted the role of untouched forests in combating climate change. Untouched natural forests could carry three times more carbon than previously thought, the report found.

Professor Garnaut's move to shift the climate debate towards biosequestration came as big business appealed to Brendan Nelson to moderate his hardline opposition to the Government's proposed emissions trading scheme, warning that the stance was hurting companies craving political certainty as they pondered major investment decisions.

The Business Council of Australia yesterday described political bipartisanship as vital if the nation was to craft a workable trading system in response to climate change while preserving an environment of investment certainty. The BCA said the Opposition's position on the ETS was not contributing to investment certainty.

Dr Nelson has struggled in recent months to craft a clear policy on the ETS, insisting Australia should not commit to action to reduce its emissions unless major emitters such as the US and China have also agreed to take action.

Calling for a smooth transition to a lower-emissions future, BCA chief executive Katie Lahey told The Australian yesterday that while the BCA had its arguments with the detail of the Rudd ETS proposals, it wanted bipartisan support for the concept of swift action on climate change.

"This is because business needs certainty, in particular in relation to anything that may impact on long-term investment decisions," Ms Lahey said.

"The BCA believes on an issue of such transformational importance to the economy as emission trading, that bipartisanship is critical to ensure the most workable scheme is adopted."

Wayne Swan seized on the BCA appeal as evidence that the Opposition had lost its way on acting to support the nation's economic wellbeing.

"We've already had a decade of denial and inaction on climate change from the Liberals and now they seem determined to deny Australian business the certainty it needs to invest in the low-emissions economy of the future," the Treasurer said.

Professor Garnaut said better management of agricultural and forestry assets could be "genuinely transformative" in Australia's greenhouse gas mitigation efforts, and the global response.

He said Australia's large tracts of unproductive pastoral country also had great "potential value".

Professor Garnaut also called for the creation of a specialist institute of climate change science to fill the large gaps in the nation's scientific response to global warming.

While Australia had a great capacity for adaptation, it was not great enough for the job at hand.

The task had been made all the harder by decisions by governments worldwide to run down scientific expertise in food production, he said.