

MEDIA RELEASE: WE MUST ASK POLITICIANS STOP LOGGING PUBLIC NATIVE FORESTS AND BURNING FORESTS FOR ELECTRICITY TO AVOID THE WORST IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE. DALIAN PUGH.

With 2018 one of the 4 warmest years on record, and 2019 shaping up to beat them all, the North East Forest Alliance (NEFA) is calling upon the community to stand up and demand that their politicians take real and effective action to combat climate change by protecting and rehabilitating public forests, while stopping the substitution of electricity derived from native forests for genuine renewable energy.

Over the past 100 years Australia's average land and water temperatures have increased by 1°C¹.

"As the Christmas heatwave demonstrates we are in a time of climate emergency, where heatwaves have increased six-fold since 1980 and are becoming more extreme¹. With this comes more extreme droughts and more extreme fires" NEFA spokesperson Dailan Pugh said.

"Our declining rainfalls, declining streamflows, increasing temperatures and increasing fires are not solely attributed to global warming, as the clearing of forests or their conversion to regrowth is making a significant direct contribution².

"We need our forests now more than ever for their ecosystem services and to help reduce atmospheric carbon. They breathe in a third of the carbon dioxide we pump into the atmosphere each year, store the carbon in their trunks and soils, and give us back oxygen.

"While world governments half-heartedly attempt to address their carbon emissions (none less so than Australia) we are being sold the furphy that replacing coal with biomass is part of the solution, when really it will worsen the problem.

"The claim is that burning forests (biomass) for electricity has no effect on CO₂ emissions under the pretence that they are cutting down 50-200 year old trees and replacing them with seedlings that will eventually reabsorb the carbon released. We cannot afford to wait for the decades or centuries required to replace the lost carbon^{3,5}.

"The reality is that burning biomass for electricity releases one and a half times more CO₂ than coal and four times more than gas^{3,4}. The Governments are cooking the books and will cook us too.

"After the collapse in the highly profitable export woodchip industry in north-east NSW in 2013 the logging industry began advocating for another revenue stream. Accordingly, in 2014 the NSW Government changed the rules to allow wood obtained from land clearing and logging to be burnt to generate electricity.

"In 2017 the Department of Primary Industries proposed establishing plants in north-east NSW to process one million tonnes (400,000 tonnes from public forests) of low quality logs into wood pellets for electricity generation. In early 2018 the Forestry Corporation issued an Expression of Interest for new Wood Supply Agreements for 416,851 tonnes a year of low quality and residual logs from north east NSW's native forests and plantations.

"In the November 2018 Regional Forest Agreements for north-east NSW's public forests the NSW and Commonwealth Governments committed to zone 140,000 ha for clearfelling, double logging intensity elsewhere, and to more than double the cut of small and low-quality logs from 320,000 to 660,000 tonnes per annum.

"This increased logging intensity is obviously intended to be for electricity generation. Replacing genuine renewable energy with forest biomass may make money for the loggers but will condemn us to runaway climate change because of the false premise⁵ that it is reducing carbon pollution.

"We need Governments that will treat our current climate emergency with the urgency and honesty required. Clearly the current NSW and Commonwealth Governments have no intent to do so" Mr. Pugh said.

NEFA is calling upon the community to demand of candidates for the March NSW elections and May Federal elections that they will commit to taking meaningful action on climate change, including by stopping logging of public forests to allow our regenerating forests to age and regain the carbon they have lost, stopping clearing of forests, and reinstating the prohibition on burning trees from native forests for electricity generation.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR COMMENT: Dailan Pugh dailan@tpg.com.au

1. CSIRO and BoM (2018) State of the Climate 2018
2. Pugh, D (2018) Clearing our Rainfall Away. https://www.nefa.org.au/water_yields
There is abundant scientific evidence that deforestation and degradation of vegetation causes significant reductions in rainfall by:
 - reducing the recycling of rainfall to the atmosphere by transpiration
 - reducing the drawing in of moist coastal air
 - reducing updrafts of moist air
 - reducing rooting depth and the recycling of deep soil moisture
 - increasing loss of water from the land by runoff
 - reducing the organic aerosols necessary for the condensation of rain drops

Deforestation has other climatic impacts; the reduction of surface roughness increases wind speeds, the reduction of transpiration increases temperatures by reducing evaporative cooling and cloud cover, and the burning of vegetation releases soot to the atmosphere where it can reduce rainfall.

3. [Prof Sir John Beddington](https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-bioenergy-flaw-under-eu-renewable-target-could-raise-emissions) (2017): <https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-bioenergy-flaw-under-eu-renewable-target-could-raise-emissions>
*Several studies (for instance, [Laganiere et al 2017](#), [Mitchell et al 2012](#)) have calculated carbon payback periods for forest bioenergy under various management regimes at decades or even hundreds of years: yet *it is now*, in the early part of the 21st century, when we need to drastically reduce our carbon emissions. ... the lower burning temperature of wood and its *greater carbon intensity* means wood releases more carbon than fossil fuels per unit of energy generated (almost 4 times more than natural gas, and over 1.5x that of coal).*
4. Bremmer, J. (2016): <https://ntn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NTN-Burning-Biomass-Report-April-2016-1.pdf>
Allocating scarce clean energy funds and renewable energy credits to biomass projects that release more greenhouse gases (GHG) than both coal and gas, undermines genuine, safe renewable energy projects such as wind, wave and solar and undermines the very intent of the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act and associated Renewable Energy Target (RET).
5. Stermann et. al. (2017) <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aaa512/meta>
... projected growth in wood harvest for bioenergy would increase atmospheric CO2 for at least a century because new carbon debt continuously exceeds NPP [Net Primary Productivity]. Assuming biofuels are carbon neutral may worsen irreversible impacts of climate change before benefits accrue.

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