

# Opinion: A life and death election

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**Dailan Pugh**

This federal election will decide the quality of life for future generations, and irrespective of who wins it is looking pretty bleak.

The Nationals are hell bent on a path to runaway climate change without a care for the future, while the ALP (Australian Labor Party) are only marginally better, paying lip service to the problem while they backflip through the election campaign.

With both we get more coal and Coal Seam Gas mining, as well as the burgeoning new industry of pelletising native trees and burning them to replace coal and displace genuine renewables.

## **As the world cooks**

We need to stop our forests and their creatures being flogged while the world cooks. With climate change gathering momentum, wildlife populations crashing, and ecosystems collapsing the earth is on the brink of an environmental disaster, its sixth mass extinction event.

Through the [IPCC](#), the world's leading scientists have warned us that if we want to meet the global ambition of limiting global warming to 1.5°C we need to reduce our carbon-dioxide emissions by 45 per cent by 2030, and to reach net zero by around 2050. In tandem we need to restore and expand our forests to take-up more of our carbon emissions. Forests currently absorb around a third of our emissions, and the IPCC identify we need to increase the area of forests by 9.5 million km<sup>2</sup> by 2050 to take up more carbon.

The world is currently on trend for a 3–5°C warming this century. We have run out of time to stuff around, if we are to have any chance of leaving a habitable world for the future we need to start turning things around now.

When the ALP announced their climate change action plan in April it committed to the IPCCs 1.5°C targets, with 50 per cent of electricity to be sourced from renewable energy by 2030. Though something was rotten, they had removed their prohibition on burning native forests for electricity and were spruiking 'huge opportunities' for an export bioenergy industry. After NEFA (North East Forest Alliance) raised our concerns in the media, local ALP candidates and the shadow energy spokesperson Mark Butler, denied there was any intent to burn native forests for electricity.

We asked for written commitments from Justine Elliot in Tweed, Patrick Deegan in Page, Andrew Woodward in Cowper and from Mark Butler.

After three weeks their only response was that the ALP would support the timber industry's request to [remove the Carbon Farming Initiative \(CFI\) water rule](#) to enable subsidies for commercial plantations of pulpwood rather than just long-term environmental plantings.

Australia already has a million hectares of hardwood plantations, more than enough to provide all our hardwood sawnwood needs, except that 98 per cent of the timber harvested is used for pulplogs, and most is exported. We do not need to change the rules to provide subsidies for short rotation export timber crops at the expense of long-term carbon sequestration.

### **ALP support CSG and renege on forest reserves**

Strangely at the same time the ALP [directed us to their intent](#) to construct gas pipelines to facilitate CSG (Coal Seam Gas) in the Northern Territory and central Queensland, where fracking the gas out of the Beetaloo basin alone is equivalent to building [50 new coal-fired power stations](#). Hardly reassuring.

Then on May 1 the ALP stated that at the industry's behest they intended to renege on their policy to support the 2012 Tasmanian Forestry Agreement, a peace deal which included placing 356,000ha of forest in permanent reserves. [Joel Fitzgibbon stated](#), 'we do not support a Tarkine national park nor the transfer of any other timber production forests into reserves.' The next day the ALP did a double backflip with Bill Shorten recommitting to the peace deal.

Joel Fitzgibbon wasn't finished, later that day he released an [ALP forest plan](#) to give loggers another \$20 million in subsidies, subsidise another 400,000ha of plantations, accept Regional Forest Agreements without review, and to change their policy to allow native forests to be burnt as renewable energy.

### **Forests needed for carbon capture**

The ALP had been lying to us and are changing policy on the run to try to hold onto three marginal Tasmanian seats and appease the CFMEU.

Burning trees for electricity generates 1.5 times [more carbon dioxide than coal](#). When we are in a climate emergency, pretending that replacing coal with trees is renewable energy that results in no carbon emissions is frighteningly dangerous stuff.

Rather than burning them, we need to restore the carbon-carrying capacity of [our native forests](#), while establishing [the new native forests](#) needed to sequester and store more of our carbon emissions for the long term.

If we are to turn this climate emergency around we need a government that hastens our transition to genuine renewable energy while increasing the ability of our forests to take up carbon. The ALPs election backflips to appease the CFMEU are jeopardising our future, so we need at least one more.

If you live in the marginal seats of Richmond and Page you can demand of the ALP candidates Justine Elliot and Patrick Deegan that the ALP re-commit to no-burning of native forests for electricity, so [we can head this threat off](#) before it is too late. You will need to shout loudly to make the ALP listen.

To appreciate the global dimensions of the biomass threat watch the 30 minute version of [Burned-Are Trees the New Coal?](#)

◆ Dailan Pugh is from North East Forest Alliance.