



Coastwatchers
Eurobodalla's voice for nature



Protecting Australia's forests and climate from biomass burning

The Hon. Anthony Albanese,
Prime Minister of Australia

cc. The Hon. Chris Bowen, Minister for Climate Change and Energy
cc. Paul Erickson, National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party

September 12, 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

Burning our native forests for energy production – concerns of Zero South East, Friends of the Forest (Mogo), Coastwatchers and National Trust (Far South Coast Branch)

We write to express concern at the emerging 'biomass burning' industry to generate domestic energy supply for Australian businesses (such as power stations) and households. This industry would involve harvesting Australia's native forests for wood to burn.

We are deeply worried at the impact of this industry - if it is allowed to take hold – on two aspects of our environment, namely:

Biodiversity. Australia's forests are some of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world and have been extensively damaged by logging and bushfires. The wood-chipping industry has introduced clear-fell logging which damages habitat for wildlife only found in old trees. Using forests for biomass burning would have a devastating impact on our vulnerable forest biodiversity, including dozens of endangered species like the Yellow-bellied Glider, Powerful Owl and Koala.

Climate change. Our forests contain a massive store of carbon and, every day, sequester vast amounts more. Logging these forests for wood to burn will worsen climate change by releasing large amounts of carbon back to the atmosphere and, furthermore, through loss of drawdown.

The problem here is that, under an amendment to Federal Government regulations made by the Abbott government, energy from forest wood is classified as 'clean and renewable', thus counting as 'zero emissions' when burned. This makes the practice attractive to the wood-burning industry. But this classification does not pass even the most basic common-sense test. The government's own standard method of assessment for tree-based carbon, Fullcam, predicts that clear-felling of forests for short-lifetime wood products will create a net increase in carbon emissions for decades (well beyond our 2050 target for net zero!). This is hardly renewable, let alone clean!

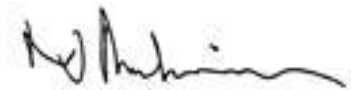
Right now, you have the ability to reverse the damage done by Tony Abbott by simply restoring the Gillard government's regulation which excluded native forest biomass as a source of renewable energy. By doing so you will stop this industry taking hold and keep open the far better option of protecting and restoring our most important (and economical) carbon storage and sequestration system.

We are asking you, as a matter of urgency, to:

1. Reinstate the Gillard government regulation that excluded native forest biomass from the definition of renewable energy under the Renewable Energy Act;
2. Remove all 'native forest waste' as eligible wood waste for use by accredited power stations that apply for Large Scale Generation Certificates.
3. Ensure all Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF) methods that allow the substitution of coal with wood are amended to prevent the use of any native forest biomass for this purpose.
4. Make it clear to the Australian public that you do not support logging and wood-chipping of Australia's forests for energy production, and that our forests should be protected for their biodiversity and climate change mitigation values.

Please protect Australia's unique and important forests, forest biodiversity, and climate by stopping this senseless industry from gaining a stronghold in Australia.

Yours sincerely



Dr. Margaret Mackinnon, [ZeroSE](#), mmackinnon.mackinnon@gmail.com

Co-signatories

Joslyn Van der Moolen, [Coastwatchers](#), joslyn@coastwatchers.org.au

Nick Hopkins, [Friends of the Forest, Mogo](#), nickhopkins1910@gmail.com

Frances Perkins, [Far South Coast Branch of the National Trust](#), potts_perkins@bigpond.com

Addendum – Supporting arguments

1. Maintaining the forests of south east Australia in order to store and sequester carbon is a highly effective use of our land resources to achieve net zero

An inventory of carbon storage and drawdown opportunities for regional LGAs in the South east Region of NSW [shows](#) that their forests [store](#) 300 times the annual emissions from domestic electricity, industry and transport, and can [avoid](#) 55 times the annual emissions and [draw down](#) 1.3 times the annual emissions if managed differently. In other words, our forests are an effective weapon against climate change.

2. Science on the climate impacts of logging versus protecting forests is clear

The myth that logging is carbon neutral has been promoted through a carbon accounting sleight of hand that [allows](#) emissions from areas logged in any year to be netted out by sequestration in the entire forest estate.

Unlogged forests [store](#) 40% to 55% more carbon than logged forests.

[Peer reviewed evidence](#) shows native forest logging makes forests more flammable and leads to elevated fire severity.

Allowing forests to grow old, known as 'proforestation', is the fastest and lowest risk pathway to increase sequestration in forests, given that they [sequester](#) more carbon, more securely in the last two thirds of their life than in the first third.

Protection [offers](#) the highest total and per hectare climate mitigation value of any climate action in forests.

3. Markets influence the intensity of logging

Markets have [always](#) determined which forests are economical to log.

By providing a market for trees that would otherwise have no commercial value (a flexible concept used to define waste), wood bioenergy will inevitably lead to an intensification of logging of native forests.

The viability of commodity production is [dependent](#) upon maximising volume and minimising costs. Clear-fell logging, which is encouraged by the creation of a market for wood to generate power, maximises volume and lowers unit costs.

The introduction of woodchip markets provides a perfect example of the radical change in area, age and type of forests logged to supply that market.

As demand for Australia's native forest woodchips wanes, new markets based on high-volume, low-cost products are sought to cross-subsidise native forest logging.

4. The entwined nature of the climate and biodiversity crises.

The biodiversity crisis is as serious a threat to life on Earth as the climate crisis.

At a joint workshop last year, the scientific advisory bodies to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, IPCC and IPBES respectively [concluded](#) that each crisis amplifies the other and that neither crisis can be solved unless they are solved together.

The workshop identified priorities for synergistic action – the top two being the protection and restoration of carbon and species-rich ecosystems such as forests.

Given the parlous state of biodiversity in Australia and escalating risks of species loss from a range of interacting threats including logging, fire and climate change, it is imperative we shift the focus of managing native forests to ecological recovery in order to increase their stability and resilience.