Australian Forest and Climate Alliance (AFCA)

Vision and Policy Principles Document January 2009

Vision

Protecting Australia's native forests and woodlands *and* making deep cuts in fossil fuel and industrial emissions are vital to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Native forests play a crucial role in the long-term storage of carbon. Protecting forests from logging and clearing is an essential part of any credible climate change policy.

An immediate end to clearing, industrial scale logging and woodchipping of native forests (deforestation and degradation) will make a critical contribution to mitigating climate change and will protect biodiversity, water and natural ecosystems in Australia.

In achieving this vision we expect Australian governments to take international leadership roles in advancing these policies.

Principles

To make deep and rapid cuts, which is fundamental to stabilising global temperature rise to avoid dangerous climate change, prioritization of policies and mechanisms to prevent and reduce GHG emissions from the destruction and degradation of natural ecosystems, particularly forests, is crucial.

Emissions from deforestation alone are estimated to be at least 18% of total global emissions, and emissions in the same order of magnitude that can likely be attributed to forest degradation, especially logging.

Consequently the next UNFCCC global climate treaty must include international rules that protect forests and other natural ecosystems. [1]

We also urge accounting methodologies which cover all anthropogenic sources and sinks and which disaggregate emissions from sequestration.

In developing a new framework, any international mechanism must enhance and not adversely affect the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples.

Policy adopted by Australia should mandate retention of carbon in natural ecosystems as a climate and biodiversity priority and endorse a hierarchy of mechanisms to achieve this. Such a hierarchy will recognise a continuum from maintaining intact forest and other natural ecosystems through degradation to deforestation/de-vegetation.

It comprises, from most to least desirable:

1. Protection of native forest and other natural ecosystems
2. Restoration / ecological recovery of disturbed or damaged forests and other natural ecosystems
3. Ecologically appropriate re-afforestation and re-vegetation

[1] This means that we urge rectification of LULUCF perversities, prioritization of REDD in a way that avoids carrying the LULUCF perversities into this arena, harmonization of REDD and LULUCF to the same strategic approach, and recognition that biodiversity protection is a core benefit to the ultimate objective of the UNFCCC.

Ruling out:

4. Conversion of natural forests and other natural ecosystems and to plantations
5. Deforestation and De-vegetation
6. Carbon credits for harvested wood products
7. Bioenergy, biochar and biofuel from native forests and other natural ecosystems
8. Mandatory Renewable Energy Targets eligibility for bioenergy from native forest and other natural ecosystems
9. The inclusion of plantations native forests and revegetation in emissions trading

Rationale:

1. The science shows that primary forest contains more carbon than forest managed for industrial wood production. Forest protection is vital to retaining existing carbon stocks and to restoring full carbon carrying capacity of forests. Biodiversity confers resilience and permanence and maximizes long term carbon carrying capacity.

2. It is important to distinguish between carbon carrying capacity and current carbon stocks (which are a result of land use history). Hence restoration and recovery of natural forest is the next most important action after retention of primary forests.

3. Under what is known as 'ecologically sustainable forest management' (ESFM) logging regimes, depletion of between 40-60% of carbon stocks occurs and is not recovered so long as such forest management continues. Forest management that may be sustainable with respect to wood supply is inherently unsustainable with respect to maximizing carbon stores and associated biodiversity.

4. Sequestration to recover from loss of forest carbon is not as effective or efficient as maintenance of carbon stocks in the first place, but restoring previously forested land is preferable to planting new monocultures of trees once such losses have occurred. Timeframes involved in recovery are long, and in the short term amounts sequestered are relatively small.

5. The conversion of natural forest to plantation is highly emissive, at around 80% carbon loss, and thus not a viable or acceptable mechanism for reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation. A plantation is not a forest, and there are important issues of biodiversity loss and social impacts.

In the COP 13 Bali Action Plan, it is acknowledged that not only is deforestation to be addressed but that there is a continuum of carbon loss comprising forest degradation which must be tackled. Our proposed hierarchy is developed specifically to recognize, elaborate and implement this objective.

Definitions developed earlier for LULUCF are being revised. Perverse outcomes such as wholesale conversion of forests to plantations without acknowledgement that any change has occurred for carbon accounting purposes must be rectified.

Definitions:

Careful consideration needs to be given to definitions of natural and plantation forests, deforestation and degradation so that perverse outcomes are avoided.

1. Forests. The current definition of a forest sets a minimum10% canopy cover and trees of at least 2 metres in height. A new definition of forest is required to differentiate between native forest and plantations.

(i) Natural Forest: A natural forest is a terrestrial ecosystem generated and maintained primarily through natural ecological and evolutionary processes. Natural forests are an essential part of

the global carbon cycle, and have played, and continue to play, a major role in modulating the strength of the greenhouse affect.

(ii) Plantation: A plantation is a crop of trees planted and regularly harvested by humans.

2. Forest degradation. Define degradation to include the impacts of any land-use activity that reduces the carbon stock of a forest relative to its natural carbon carrying capacity. Deforestation is the extreme end of a continuum of degradation.

3. Forest Management. Specific identification of ecological sustainability should be a core component because industrial logging regimes that are significantly carbon emissive and destructive of biodiversity fall under the current definition. Sustainable Forest Management should be defined as a forest management system that has a proven record of ecological sustainability, is socially equitable, culturally appropriate, and does not increase emissions.

The following groups contributed to generating this statement: Lawyers for Forests, South-East Region Conservation Alliance, Environment East Gippsland,West Australian Forest Alliance, Australian Youth Climate Coalition, Coastwatchers, Chipstop,Huon Valley Environment Centre, Friends of the Earth, GECO, The Wilderness Society Inc.,Environment Tasmania, Southeast Forest Rescue, coolforests.org, Still Wild Still Threatened,Australian Conservation Foundation, Environment Network, North-East Forest Alliance,Forest Action Trust, Healthy Soils Australia