

**SCIENTISTS WARN OFF OAKESHOTT, GRAHAM LLOYD, ENVIRONMENT EDITOR
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A GROUP of leading scientists has called on independent Rob Oakeshott to abandon his bid to extend renewable energy subsidies to include electricity produced from burning native forests.

In an open letter, the scientists, a group that includes ecologists, climate change researchers and biologists, have highlighted the potential threats to communities and environments, as well as the climate change impact of native forest biomass.

The letter is in response to Mr Oakeshott's decision to disallow a change to the Renewable Energy regulations that would have ruled out incentives for burning native forests for electricity.

Mr Oakeshott's move has alarmed long-time forest campaigners, who claim that it will provide a low value replacement for woodchips.

More than 90 per cent of the state forest harvest is now converted to wood chips. Signatories to the letter include: William F. Laurance, James Cook University; Grant Wardell-Johnson, Curtin University; Elizabeth Murchison, King's College, Cambridge; and Steffen Lehmann, University of South Australia. The open letter states that:

- Forest biomass emits more greenhouse gases than fossil fuels per unit of energy produced.
- Burning forests to produce energy would lead to significant carbon emissions that would take centuries to recover.
- Biomass harvesting was likely to involve intensified logging and heightened impacts on soil and invertebrate biodiversity.
- Harvesting the majority of timber from a logging operation could still be used as feedstock
- Giving subsidies to the logging industry would undermine opportunities for the development of clean energy technologies.
- Australians did not want energy generated from the burning of native forests supplied to their homes.

Australian National University economist Judith Ajani said there were many planned projects around Australia poised to take advantage of RECs subsidies if Mr Oakeshott's motion succeeded.

"They are not viable without this subsidy," she said.

"This would mean that electricity consumers would be unwittingly subsidising the ongoing destruction of Australia's native forests.

"They would be paying higher prices for electricity in order to help breathe new life into an industry that has had its day."

A spokesman for Mr Oakeshott said the MP could see no difference between burning native forest or plantation timber for power generation.

Mr Oakeshott's disallowance motion will automatically take effect on March 21 unless it is defeated in parliament.