

Incinerating Australia' forests for electricity here or overseas is worse than burning coal but both major parties will do it

International trade in wood pellets to fuel power stations is predicted to increase by more than 250% this coming decade.ⁱ

To counter this threat, eighty national and state non-government organisations, five political parties and a cross section of independent MPs are calling for a ban on burning native forests for energy in a [National Position Statement against Forest Bioenergy](#).ⁱⁱ This policy is relevant to the Australian election.

“This will put Australia’s native forests in peril as never before,” according to Frances Pike, spokesperson for the Australian Forests and Climate Alliance (AFCA).

“Since large-scale energy generation from wood has been deemed renewable, subsidies have helped double its expansion from 30 Gigawatt in 2007 to over 60 GW in 2017.

“Emissions from global forest degradation have also doubled within that time period.”ⁱⁱⁱ

“Burning wood instead of coal is lucrative because it is subsidised as ‘renewable’ energy. Yet the emissions it generates are not accounted for even though wood releases more carbon into the atmosphere per unit of energy than coal.

“The emissions from burning forests for electricity are relegated to the land use sector where statistics on deforestation and forest degradation do not reflect the real impact. It’s an emissions accounting trick that destroys the world’s forests while increasing global greenhouse emissions.

As Asia replaces coal with wood, the Coalition is offering Australia’s forests as a major source of wood pellets. It’s estimated that by 2027 we’ll see 3 million tonnes of our forests exported annually as wood pellets, in addition to the millions of tonnes already exported as woodchips or whole trees.

“The ALP no longer rejects incinerating forests for power as it did once in 2012, and has joined the Coalition in embracing it. This is against recent recommendations to policy makers by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which is now moving against forest bioenergy.

“Australian voters need to know we have some of the most carbon dense forests in the world. The carbon they store must not be released into the atmosphere here or overseas.

“The Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, Australian Conservation Foundation, Birdlife Australia branches, the Climate Council, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the Wilderness Society, the Australian Marine Conservation Society, most state conservation councils and many other national and regional groups all endorse this critical stance against native forest bioenergy.

“We call on Labor to re-instate its former ban on using native forests for this purpose. While the Coalition has consistently championed incineration of forest biomass at the behest of the logging industry, we call on it to reconsider its position, in light of widespread concern for the environment. Several political parties which respect science and the growing awareness of the urgent need to protect native forests are contesting this election.

“If we stop logging native forests we can immediately reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 20%. Left to mature, these forests will provide increasing carbon capture and storage, more homes for wildlife, better preservation of water, soil and fresh air.” she said.

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ⁱ <https://environmentalpaper.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Threat-Map-Briefing-Are-Forests-the-New-Coal-01.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://forestsandclimate.org.au/cms/wp-content/uploads/position-statement-against-forest-bioenergy.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ From an average of 0.4 Gt CO₂ yr⁻¹ in the period 1991–2000 to an average of 1.0 Gt CO₂ yr⁻¹ for 2011–2015, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4470e.pdf>