

Letter published in Bay Post 14 January 2009 by Harriet Swift

NOTHING CARBON NEUTRAL ABOUT IT

Robert Evans has argued the case (Bay Post 9 Jan) for burning native forest wood to generate electricity.

I have never met anyone who supports wholesale forest destruction for woodchips, burning for electricity or anything else who doesn't make money of it. Could Mr Evans be the first?

Or could he be the Robert Evans employed by Forests NSW?

While there are ethical issues about omitting this important fact from his letter, I will ignore them here.

Forests NSW, like others in the woodchipping industry sees burning wood as a way to maintain its current level of business activity once other factors reduce the woodchip market.

The Government White Paper has brought this a step closer by classifying all biofuels, including native forest wood as carbon neutral. Draft legislation on the new national Mandatory Renewable Energy Target backs this up.

Neither distinguishes between native forest and plantation biomass nor bothers trying to con us into thinking of native forest wood as "waste."

Wood fired power generation is anything but carbon neutral if we take into account the enormous emissions generated by native forest logging, in other words the whole life cycle of the fuel.

One recent estimate puts the greenhouse emissions of woodchip power at 6.4 times those of coal fired power if we include all carbon released on logging.

When a forest is felled and the wood is burned, it takes 80 years for the emissions from the wood burning to be neutralized by the regrowth forest.

It is more than twice as long when all logging emissions such as loss of soil carbon are taken into account.

Burning wood for electricity will only be viable for the Eden chipmill if wood is included in the Rudd Government's expanded Mandatory Renewable Energy Target (MRET) scheme, where it will be competing with genuine renewables such as solar, wind and tidal.

In our region, this means that Eden woodchip power will be directly competing with the Clean Energy for Eternity Solar Farm.

This will be a very unfair contest as woodchip power under MRET will be a lot cheaper than the solar power.