MEDIA RELEASE

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PROTECTING NATURAL FORESTS CRUCIAL FOR CLIMATE CHANGE
WORLD-FIRST STUDY FINDS 3 TIMES MORE CARBON IN AUSSIE FORESTS THAN
PREVIOUSLY KNOWN

South-east Australia's natural forests are among the most carbon dense in the world and store
three times more carbon than Australian and international climate change experts realise,
a world-first study released today at The Australian National University revealed.

The largest stocks of carbon are found in the tall wet eucalypt forests of Victoria and Tasmania,
These forests support trees up to 80 metres tall and can contain more than 1200 tonnes of carbon
per hectare, which is up to 10 times more carbon per hectare than previously realised.

ANU scientists have calculated that the average amount of carbon stored in unlogged natural
eucalypt forests is about 640 tonnes per hectare. According to the leading worldwide climate
change scientific body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the average carbon stock
in temperate forests is only 217 tonnes of carbon per hectare.

The findings represent a breakthrough in understanding the role of forests in long term carbon
storage and in helping solve the climate change problem. The authors - Professor Brendan
Mackey, Dr Heather Keith, Dr Sandra Berry and Professor David Lindenmayer - found that a
new approach is needed to account for carbon stored in natural forests.

"Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries has
been the focus for the international community since the United Nations climate change
conference in Bali last December, but this is also an issue for Australia," Professor Mackey
said.

About half of Australia's forests have been cleared in the last 220 years and the carbon stocks in
more than 50 per cent of the remaining unprotected forests have been degraded by land use
activities such as logging. Professor Mackey said the research should alert Australian governments
and international agencies of the urgent need to protect the carbon stored in natural forests as part
of the suite of measures needed to solve the climate change problem.

"Protecting the carbon in Australia's and the world's natural forests is no longer an option - it is
a necessity," Professor Mackey said. "If natural forests continue to be cleared and degraded
then the CO₂ released will significantly increase concentrations of greenhouse gases in the
atmosphere. The carbon stored in natural forests is a larger and more reliable stock than
the carbon stored in commercially logged forests and plantations."

The research from the Fenner School of Environment and Society at ANU found that around 9.3
billion tonnes of carbon can be stored in the 14.5 million hectares of natural eucalypt forests in
south-east Australia if they are left undisturbed. The carbon currently stored in these forests is
equivalent to "avoided emissions" of 460 million tonnes of CO₂ per year for the next 100
years.

The Green Carbon research is online: http://epress.anu.edu.au/green carbon
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