

FORESTS AND CLIMATE FORUM TAKES ON POLITICAL AND UNION NO GO AREA

A forum in Canberra on the 13th August will take-on a traditional political and union no go area when it considers the value of Australia's native forests in the battle against climate change.

Leading Australian climate-change scientists will come together with economists, politicians and high profile conservationists at the Australian National University, to look at current policies on public forests and implications for the mainland post the Tasmanian forest negotiations.

The national Forests and Climate Forum convenor Mike Thompson says keynote speakers will go directly to the heart of the issue when they question why native forests are still being logged and woodchipped. He says there is now overwhelming evidence to show Australia's native forests are of much greater economic and environmental value left in the ground, where they can continue to store and soak up carbon, maintain biodiversity and preserve water catchments.

"The evidence is now compelling, new CSIRO research has found conserving and restoring forests should become a priority in fighting climate change. The study has shown 'the capacity of forests to make a difference for climate protection is much bigger than we thought'," Mr Thompson said.

"The calls for the Federal Government's one billion dollar biodiversity fund to be used to transition out of native forest logging are becoming harder to ignore. Forest degradation is not just an issue for other countries. State forest logging in Tasmania, Victoria and NSW contributes an estimated 10 per cent of Australia's emissions total."

Mr Thompson said keynote speakers at the forum would include Climate Commission panellist Professor Brendan Mackey; campaigns' director for Getup.org Paul Oosting, and the president of the World Wildlife Fund in Australia, Dr Denis Saunders. He said the Federal Government would be represented by Dr Mike Kelly, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. "Dr Kelly is the member for Eden Monaro, the bellwether seat in the south east corner of NSW that supplies the Nippon Paper woodchip plant at Eden with our native forests that are turned into woodchips and export to Asia for bargain basement prices.

"Over a million tonnes of chips are sent from Eden each year. Logging operations to feed this woodchip mill generate emissions equivalent to the 3% pollution generated by Hazelwood, Australia's dirtiest coal-fired power station. Transitioning out of this unsustainable industry is not only possible, but economically, environmentally and socially sensible," said Mr Thompson.

He said the forum would also look at the increased risk of fire to communities from native forest logging, and would consider key data and issues of logging industry economics, law, science and carbon accounting, plus implications of the Clean Energy Future legislation including the Biodiversity Fund and Carbon Farming Initiative.

The national Forests and Climate Forum will be held from 9am, Saturday 13th August, at the John Curtin School of Medical Research, 131 Garran Road, Australian National University, Canberra.

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