

BUSHLAND BATTLE: BIODIVERSITY OR BIOENERGY?

Opening our native forests to the bioenergy market will be ‘all pain for no gain’, according to a leading Australian economist and forestry expert.

Dr Judith Ajani from The Australian National University will discuss this and other points at a seminar **today**, which brings the two main opposing views about native forests in climate change policy face to face.

“The forestry industry argues that we should substitute fossil fuels and emission-intensive products with native forest wood because trees re-grow,” she said. “But ecological and other scientists oppose this view, highlighting the current and potential carbon stocks in native forests and their biodiversity values.”

To test the arguments, Dr Ajani analysed a representative hectare of native forest used for wood production on a 100 year rotation. She said the results were clear cut.

“We found that logging a native forest stand released large amounts of carbon which, in this scenario, took 100 years to recover,” she said.

“We also demonstrated that if all of the native forest logs that were cut in 2009 were shifted into energy production, it would substitute for only 2.8 per cent of our coal-based electricity production.

“Furthermore, to capture the typically desired 10 per cent (electricity) market share, native forest logging in Australia would need to triple, which would lead to a permanent reduction in the carbon stored in our native forests.”

Dr Ajani said a major shift was essential in the way Australia viewed native forests in its climate change policy.

“Australia’s ‘carbon neutral’ accounting and policy position for native forest logging is an undesirable ‘time neutral’ position,” she said. “Logging of native forests requires decades to return the forest’s carbon stocks to pre-logging levels.

“Continuing native forest logging means large carbon emissions at this most crucial time for humans on planet Earth – the next 30 to 40 years. Time is critical, not neutral, in climate change policy.

“Global carbon accounting frameworks also need to specifically account for the fact that native forests and plantations are fundamentally different ecosystems. Currently, they don’t.

“Finally, with native forest sawn timber now a declining remnant market share and chip exports now being rapidly displaced by Australia’s hardwood plantations, we can afford to not open our native forests to the bioenergy market.”

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WHAT: Dr Judith Ajani public lecture: Native Forests for bioenergy or biodiversity?

WHEN: 1-2pm Thursday 10 November

WHERE: Forestry Lecture Theatre, Linnaeus Way, ANU

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