

'Carbon neutral' forest resource grab: A corporate detour in climate change race

[Frances Pike](#) 20 March 2017, 3:30pm

The Coalition Government can't resist the logging industry, subsidising the destruction of forests as "carbon neutral" at the expense of pesky wind, solar or other annoying competitors, writes [Frances Pike](#).

SUBSTITUTING wood biomass, burning it with coal and calling it "renewable energy", just because trees regrow, doesn't make it carbon neutral.

Instantly, the combustion emits carbon.

Logging to supply the furnaces destroys forest ecosystems.

Living, they absorb and store exponentially more carbon as they mature, through ever spreading canopies, bigger trunks and branches, and extensive root systems beneath, and along the forest floor, until they reach a natural death and decompose, slowly, providing nutrient habitat for micro-organisms — a life-cycle.

The international wood biomass for energy/fuel trade is a major driver of the industrialised logging degrading world forests. [Forest biomass for energy can release three times more carbon](#) than just burning fossil fuels. It takes centuries for forests to "reabsorb" all that was released with the logging and burning. With global greenhouse gas emissions from forest degradation now [double](#) those of the previous decade, and global extinction at a catastrophic and exponentially increasing rate, lifeforms can't afford that time.

[Industry lobbying](#) has seen wood biomass for energy and fuel deemed

"carbon neutral" by governments but not by [scientists](#). Why is government slavishly legislating wood biomass energy "carbon neutral" [against the advice of esteemed climatologists, ecologists, economists](#), and internationally respected [research institutions](#)?

Biggest loser-Australia: World leader in deforestation and species extinction

[@IndependentAus](https://independentaustralia.net/environment/environment-display/australian-logging-and-the-end-of-species,7788#.VXBCqbOOZrU.twitter...)

— Lyn Bender (@Lynestel) [11:21 PM - Jun 4, 2015](#)

Co-generation (burning of wood pellets, wood chips and/or various forms of wood char) with fossil fuels has been defined as a "renewable" energy to validate and prolong the fossil fuel and logging industries. As a "renewable", it provides access to subsidies originally intended for "low emission" technologies — solar, wind, geothermal, tidal and the benign variants of bio-energy (like methane recovery from agricultural and municipal waste recycling). By rewriting the definition of renewable energy and focussing on the amount produced, instead of quantifying emissions, governments can claim action on climate change without disturbing traditional industry allies, the fossil fuel and logging fraternities.

By 2016, Australian [political donations were \\$1 billion](#) – possibly three – but determining influence is not as simple as tracking recorded donations. Assistance is roundabout; subsidiaries can obscure. Media "help" is king. Likewise, rewards take various forms. For multinationals with timber supply contracts, it's a "tradition" that [taxpayers subsidise ongoing state forest agency losses](#), accrued from the costs of servicing a "client" patron.

For decades, multi-millions in federal and state grants have helped "modernise" the timber sector or buy out those "retiring". Other arrangements exist. If supply contracts extracted by industry [prove too much for a forest](#), taxpayers compensate — the multinational, not the forest. But the big reward is renewed and possibly expanded [access to vast](#)

areas of the national native forest estate via renewals of regional forest agreements (RFAs).

The Abbott Government embraced the logging industry mantra: trees absorb carbon while growing, so their biomass for energy or fuel is simply carbon recycling, "carbon neutral". In a climate change world, this mere definition "renewed" economic access, for both the fossil fuel and logging fraternities.

Logging moved up from primary industry subsidies (flowing so beautifully since the signing of the regional forest agreements) to energy subsidies. From the large scale, renewable energy credits to burn native forests for electricity (with or without coal) the vista of access was realised, to renewable energy research and development grants. With "wood biomass carbon neutrality" determined, a plethora of wood/fossil fuel energy and fuel experiments ensues, subsidised at the expense of pesky wind, solar or other annoying competitors.

Burning biomass is not carbon neutral. Takes too long for new trees to grow to offset the carbon burned. Logging... <http://fb.me/6iwqPP93B>

— grace stiller (@gracestiller) [2:44 AM - Mar 8, 2017](#)

International companies involved in the wood biomass energy trade exert intense economic, therefore political pressure. The fossil fuel fraternity and industrialised logging are aligned. The latter produces the wood biomass, the key to the "renewable" door. Inside is access not only to renewable energy operating, research and development subsidies, but to international emission trading and offset schemes — present and future.

The same global "giants" often service both industrialised logging and mining, writes *Wise Guy Reports*:

'The growth of forestry machineries is due to huge demand in timber woods and forest biomass ... global forestry machinery market is valued at \$8.5 billion in 2014 and expected to reach \$9.81 billion by 2020'.

[Key forest machinery manufacturers](#) include Caterpillar, John Deere, Hitachi, Kubota, AGCO, Mahindra and Weifang Euroking Machinery, among others. [Some rank in the world's 300 most wealthy companies](#): John Deere at 250, Hitachi at 178, Caterpillar at 155; many others are in the top 1,000.

In 2012 [BORAL was exporting](#) Australian native forest woodchips for burning in Japan, with a view to a three-year contract . That was before the [Coalition](#) overturned the ban on burning native forests as renewable energy. With the 2015 ban overturn, the door opens wide. By 2016, BORAL's timber division announces its "bio-futures" [programme](#), to explore using residues for large-scale electricity generation and biofuels. BORAL understands the terminology – it's "residue". In the 2015 amended [Renewable Energy Target Scheme \(RET\) legislation](#), the native forest "residue" use prescription easily accommodates whole trees. Even if it didn't, it's not difficult to vary industrial practice to create "residue", as BORAL well understands.

Globally, Komatsu's forest machinery sales are \$1 billion per annum. It's a sharp upward trend with the expanding international wood biomass trade. In South Eastern Australia alone, Komatsu sells \$120,000,000 worth of logging machinery each year. Much native [forest biomass is exported to Asia](#) for processing, on-selling and/or Asian use. Taxpayers will be helping to set up the infrastructure, highways to transport biomass, facilities at ports and so on. We've got a lot of exporting to do.

In February, Komatsu's Australian sales manager [confirmed](#) that if this government agrees to industry's call that [burning wood](#) for industrial heating is "green" energy – "renewable" subsidy eligible – then Komatsu's Australian sales will further escalate.

The Australian Government doesn't seem able to resist the logging industry. Intense lobbying by [Nationals](#) friendly Australian Forests Products Association ([AFPA](#)) had Abbott overturn the ban on native forest (NF) biomass energy "eligibility" in the RET. Innovative Turnbull and his energy minister acquiesce to the biomass philosophy. A Nationals (and

Liberal) friendly industry gets its RECS and R&D subsidies. Turnbull and Frydenberg keep quiet. Coal's already out of the bag so best restrict the conversation to that. But for Forest & Wood Products Australia, not enough native forests are being burnt as renewables; RET subsidy must extend to wood burnt for industrial heating.

Senate energy bill allows forest destruction for wood chip power thru absurd "carbon neutral" amdt @lisamurkowski
[http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-environment/299462-bogus-biomass-amendment-spotlights-energy-bills ...](http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-environment/299462-bogus-biomass-amendment-spotlights-energy-bills...)

— Bill Bison Snape (@SnapeBison) [7:29 AM - Oct 6, 2016](#)

Embedding industry affiliated academics and providing research scholarships in universities internationally has lent "credibility" to the "wood burnt is carbon neutral" concept. National and international industry "bio-energy" research associations claim expertise in emission reduction technologies and carbon accounting methodology. Sponsored by companies that mine, log and make machinery, the mantra disseminates. Delay in global agreement on carbon reduction policy and monitoring systems gave vested interests time to organise entrenchment of the wood is carbon neutral concept in critical climate policy decision making arenas.

Senior forestry advocates identified their problem here 20 years ago, with climate change risk and the fact that native forests store carbon, ongoing access to native forests. Around the same time, academic researchers demonstrated that if left to recover, previously logged forests could store billions of tonnes of additional carbon making a major contribution to the very real fight against climate change.

The international logging industry wants control of the global forest resource. Some officials and politicians have reasons to facilitate privatising, or legislate secure (permanent) industry access, or sell off of national forest resources. To ward off public opposition to exclusive corporate access or sell off of a nation's forest it's important to try (or at least to be seen to be trying) to get the public on board.

The purchase of "under-utilised" forests has begun. People shall be encouraged to peacefully surrender national forests to industry's higher cause. Thus an advance on the claim that 'wood is carbon neutral' upon combustion is the next more palatable message: increased wood usage will mitigate climate change impact. Interwoven, the messages are delivered: through classroom-ready school education resources (conveniently mapped to national curriculum codes), by repetition of television ads, as games for children, in lifestyle magazines, by industry reps at regional shows and field days or any other medium a creative media company suggests. Wood strategy marketing is vast and lucrative.

To spruik "wood is the growing answer to climate change", environment "brand" names are co-opted as paid industry partners. For example, in Australia on the Planet Ark and Australia's Grand Designs TV programme, a TV ad has been playing relentlessly since 2011 with increasing frequency in "community service" time. "Brands" claim support for "sustainably sourced timber" but won't commit to what this means.

Planet Ark's approach is very democratic, saying the

'... choice of forest certification scheme(s) is a decision for forest owners/managers.'

The international logging industry agenda is directed in Australia by Forests Wood Products Australia's (FWPA's) business plan. Though securing legislated semi-perpetual access to a (preferably increased) area of the Australian native forest resource is the next stated agenda item, it might be the penultimate aim.

By 2011, the concept of "evergreen extensions" had been introduced into discussions about renewals of the 20-year RFAs, denounced by scientists as ecologically disastrous. By 2013, Abbott was eagerly promising industry that burning native wood biomass would be subsidised in an amended RET and hundreds of thousands of hectares of ancient Tasmanian forest would not be conserved but remain fully available for ongoing industrial logging. By 2015, native forest biomass was included in the RET and the Tasmanian

forest conservation deal had been torn up. But the rest of the continent's public native forests had to "be secured".

By 2016, FWPA had extracted the "evergreen extension" secure access [promise](#):

'The Coalition Government is maintaining resource security and investment confidence for the forestry industry by establishing 20-year rolling lives for each of the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs).'

Turnbull's government champions the FWPA's business plan. [Labor](#) isn't resisting either, much. The differentiation is that Labor has in the past not supported NF in the RET, nor promised "rolling" RFAs. But both parties guarantee at least [another 20 years of ecologically disastrous industrialised logging](#), to further degrade the continent's carbon sink and accelerate mass extinction.

Environmental groups demand end to logging of Australia's native forests <http://gu.com/p/4jaz6/stw>

— nativesrule.org (@nativesrule) [3:40 PM - May 19, 2016](#)

[FWPA is focussed on reversing the slipping "social licence" for native forest logging](#). To ensure the industry's ongoing access to the resource, the public must be re-educated. Social media is doing damage, as real citizens post real images of industrialised native forest logging.

[This](#) might help:

'The Committee recommends the Australian Government run public information campaigns to promote timber and wood products as replacements for more energy-intensive materials.'

The Turnbull Government agrees that taxpayers fund propaganda to be delivered to them – and to their children – and then back to them via their children. State forest agencies partner the logging industry in a national ["re-education" programme](#) to secure public approval for the "give away" of

the national native forest resource via rolling RFAs. This is an example of the perverse, yet efficient, lobbying power of industrialised logging.

Historic dependence on wood for large-scale domestic and industrial heating in cold climates facilitated the adoption of subsidising wood combustion as "renewable" (Britain, Scandinavia, parts of the US and Canada). People were accustomed to industrial scale wood use. Demand for wood biomass to fuel coal furnaces drove the push for wood from "under-utilised" forests elsewhere.

Referring to it as "environmental lunacy" in Europe, *The Economist* [noted](#):

‘European firms are scouring the earth for wood.’

As the global forest resource diminishes, larger industry players are implementing strategies to control what's left. With the legislation to the subsidies forests can bring in place, the next step is securing the resource itself. Legislated permanent or semi-permanent access, privatisation of state forests, or outright ownership is the agenda.

In the U.S., there are [advocates for privatising the national forests](#). In some ways, the forests are already privatised as private timber companies are allowed to "harvest" the trees at favourable prices — and often the government even builds the [roads](#) for them. Not unlike the situation here, corporatised state forest agencies, favourable supply agreements to "big timber", taxpayer subsidies from all levels of government — not just propping up the loss-making state forest agencies, but also local government — with rural ratepayers suffering "permanent rate hikes" to repair local road networks trashed by logging trucks and heavy machinery transport for multinationals' profit.

[Russia is also considering forest sell-off](#), urged along by [Thomas Trone](#) (former director of [Global WorkSight Solutions](#) at [John Deere Construction & Forestry](#)). Forest privatisation in New Zealand led to significant forest buy up by China and the United States. For many areas of the third world, the [forests were effectively "sold" a long time ago](#).

Should the wood biomass trade someday end, or cease to be profitable, corporations that secured "access" by owning forest resources can just "regrow" their profit — this time leaving trees in the ground for trading in carbon offsets that the nation states no longer "own". Or they might develop the forest resource — for housing or for tourism in a natural resource depleted world, [owning or controlling access to some of the last "natural areas"](#).

Forests are increasingly touted as the primary avenue to fill the gap between the internationally determined commitments made under the *Paris Agreement* and the reductions in emissions needed to keep global temperature rise below 2 degrees (and preferably 1.5). Money is rushing in, purportedly to help protect and restore forests, and to utilise forests to help meet development goals including energy needs.

To date, there is little guidance for investors looking to ensure investment in forests delivers robust climate outcomes. Worse, international finance companies respond to change in domestic energy policy moving rapidly to underwrite companies evolving into co-generation energy utilities thereby enabling entry to countries/continents, where wood biomass energy subsidises otherwise unprofitable coal utilities. Co-generation subsidisation finances acquisition and operations, and/or other experimental manoeuvres into the renewable market. Global energy and finance companies hedge their bets and help to call the shots with energy policy, globally.

The combined power of the network of international companies involved in wood biomass energy exerts a massive and almost irresistible influence, not only on national energy policies, but also on the international institutions set up to create consensus on global emission reduction targets and instruments, and to oversee carbon accounting methodology and monitoring. Intervention by vested interests involved in the wood biomass energy trade is affecting this vital work, creating more, — not fewer — emissions. And at the same time, [destroying world forests and all within them, including Australia's.](#)

Australia needs to detach itself from this highway to hell and stand against bio-massacre.

End native forest logging and clearing.

Read more by [Frances Pike](#) at nativesrule.org, visit the [Natives Rule Facebook page](#), or follow Frances on [Twitter @nativesrule](#).



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Don't believe the logging industry's propaganda: trees are not a renewable resource. If it takes decades to "renew" it's not truly renewable

— Lisa M. (@RVaMedic) [1:22 AM - Apr 18, 2013](#)

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