

Mr Rob Oakeshott MP  
Parliament House  
Canberra  
cc Mr Tony Windsor MP  
cc Members of the Federal Parliament

Dear Mr Oakeshott,

**Re: Open Letter of Concern - incentives for native forest biomass burning**

Your decision to support incentives for native forest-burning power stations has alarming ramifications for communities and natural ecosystems across Australia.

These include:

- The likelihood that carbon emissions will increase. In many circumstances, forest biomass emits more greenhouse gases than fossil fuels per unit of energy produced.<sup>i</sup> Australia's current accounting rules also mean most logging emissions are not accounted for, hiding real emissions.
- Australia's forests are some of the most carbon dense on Earth.<sup>ii</sup> Government policy that encourages the logging and burning of these forests to produce energy will lead to significant carbon emissions that would take centuries to recover.
- Current logging regimes are not ecologically sustainable. The logging of old growth and high conservation value forests and threatened species' habitats continues in Australia under existing regulatory regimes, and these regimes are demonstrably failing to protect environmental values.<sup>iii</sup> Biomass harvesting is likely to involve intensified logging and heightened impacts on soil and invertebrate biodiversity and other forest values.<sup>iv</sup>
- Under the 'high value test' covering biomass harvesting, the majority of timber from a logging operation could still be used as feedstock. High value products may form only a small percentage of the volume of timber removed from a logging area, indirectly making biomass the primary beneficiary of harvesting, just as low-value woodchips have historically been the driver for large scale logging.
- Biomass is a dirty fuel. In the United States, leading Medical Societies and health advocacy groups have called for a ban on biomass power plants as they pose an unacceptable risk to the public's health by increasing air pollution. Burning hundreds of thousands of tonnes of native forest will generate dangerous emissions of nitrogen oxides, particulate matter and sulphur dioxide.<sup>v</sup>
- Providing renewable energy subsidies to the logging industry will undermine opportunities for the development of clean energy technologies and could decrease funding available to clean energy technologies through the Clean Energy Fund. The cap on Renewable Energy Certificates means native forest burning power stations could displace other, less polluting and damaging forms of renewable electricity.<sup>vi</sup>
- Australians do not want energy generated from the burning of native forests supplied to their homes.<sup>vii</sup> Major electricity retailers and the National GreenPower group have also rejected native forest biomass power.<sup>viii</sup>

Australians overwhelmingly support greater native forest protection.

Mr Oakeshott, we urge you to consider seriously all the evidence and potential consequences related to your disallowance motion. It is our considered opinion that an evidence-based policy in this circumstance would retain the changes as proposed by the Multi-Party Climate Committee. We urge you to support this sensible policy change and act to safeguard Australian communities and ecosystems.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor William F Laurance**  
Distinguished Research Professor & Australian  
Laureate  
Prince Bernhard Chair in International Nature  
Conservation  
James Cook University, Cairns, Qld

**David Milledge**  
MRSc (UNE)  
Forest Ecologist  
Suffolk Park NSW

**Associate Professor Jean-Marc Hero**  
School of Environment  
Griffith University, Qld.

**Dr David Obendorf**  
Veterinary pathologist  
Hobart, Tasmania

**Dr Colette Harmsen**  
Field Veterinary Officer  
Save the Tasmanian Devil Program  
Launceston, Tasmania.

**Professor Steffen Lehmann,**  
Professor of Sustainable Design,  
School of Art, Architecture and Design,  
University of South Australia  
Adelaide, SA.

**Dr Peter McQuillan**  
Senior Lecturer - Honours Coordinator  
School of Geography & Environmental Studies  
University of Tasmania, Hobart

**Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick**  
School of Geography & Environmental Studies  
University of Tasmania, Hobart.

**Professor Grant Wardell-Johnson**  
Centre for Ecosystem Diversity & Dynamics  
School of Science  
Curtin University  
Perth, WA.

**Dr Brian Marshall**  
Geologist  
Leura, NSW

**Dr Duncan Robin Baigent**  
Climate Change researcher  
Bullaburra, NSW

**Dr Elizabeth Murchison**  
Research Fellow  
King's College  
University of Cambridge  
United Kingdom

**Dr Judy Clarke**  
Wildlife Biologist  
Save the Tasmanian Devil Program

**Dr David M. Spratt**  
Honorary Fellow  
Australian National Wildlife Collection  
CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences

**Dr Alesion Bleaney**  
General Practitioner  
St Helens, Tasmania.

**Adjunct Associate Professor Don White**  
School of Chemical and Biomolecular  
Engineering  
Sydney University, NSW.

- i Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences. *Biomass Sustainability and Carbon Policy Study* Executive Summary. June 2010 and Hudiberg, T.W., Law, B.E., Wirth, C. and Luysaert, S. (2011) 'Regional carbon dioxide implications of forest bioenergy production', *Nature Climate Change*, Vol 1 October 2011
- ii Heather Keith, Brendan G. Mackey, and David B. Lindenmayer. 'Re-evaluation of forest biomass carbon stocks and lessons from the world's most carbon-dense forests', *PNAS* 2009 106 (28) 11635-11640.
- iii For example, several successful and current court cases have and are proving the failure of forest management regulations to ensure the protection of endangered species' habitat in Victoria's public native forests.
- iv Raison, R.J. et al. *Review of the science relevant to the sustainable use of native and plantation forest-harvesting residues for energy production in Tasmania*. CSIRO. 2002.
- v Charles D. Connor. President & CEO. American Lung Association. *Letter to United States House of Representatives*. June 24, 2009., Massachusetts Medical Society Adopts Policy Opposing Biomass Power Plants” December 9, 2009. <http://www.massmed.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=32796>
- vi Macinstosh, Andrew. 'Oakeshott, Windsor biomass burner scheme Pythonesque.' *Crikey*. Monday, 13 February. <http://www.crikey.com.au/2012/02/13/oakeshott-windsor-biomass-burner-scheme/>
- vii A Morgan Poll commissioned by the Wilderness Society in 2001 found that 88% of people opposed the use of native forest for wood-fired power.
- viii Simon Miller, Acting Director-General, New South Wales Department of Water and Energy. Letter to Senator Bob Brown. August 2007.