

Standing up for Climate and Nature: INFM – hold Labor to account and a litmus test for the Greens

Labor, Anthony Albanese and Chris Bowen have developed a carbon trading method that would allow greenhouse gas emitters to keep polluting through buying forest carbon credits.

NSW Premier Minns is breaking a promise to protect the Great Koala National Park. His stance must be rejected.

The Greens are challenged to demonstrate national leadership on Climate and Forests by disallowing any ACCU method, including INFM, from public native forests. Pushing back on neoliberal conservation, preventing the use of native forest offsets to delay our exit from fossil fuels and fostering science-based forest climate policy, all require leadership from The Greens.

Australia's public native forests need urgent protection, and it must never be forgotten that there are legislative pathways to achieve this, without carbon trading. It must also never be forgotten that the majority of Australians want an end to native forest logging and climate action simultaneously. Not one at the expense of the other. Greater Gliders, Masked Owls, Swift Parrots, Koalas and Black Cockatoos need forest protection immediately across the nation, this must never be forgotten.

1. Neoliberal Conservation

Neoliberal conservation has a global record of failure as it attempts to shift responsibility for climate and biodiversity protection away from governments by ostensibly creating economic incentives for businesses to deliver climate and biodiversity goals – almost always by allowing the purchase of offsets to allow ongoing damage. Instead of helping to deliver climate and biodiversity goals, offsets have hindered their delivery.

INFM represents a radical and dangerous shift in environmental policy. There are dire implications of shifting responsibility away from governments to act in the public interest by properly regulating, restoring and protecting the environment. Instead relying on market mechanisms to do so.

Scant attention has been paid to the fact that on public land, where governments have direct legal custodianship and responsibility, serious conflicts of interest exist; and the integrity of ACCU methods is brought into question because it is easy to manipulate policy and management to suit political interests (viz the GKNP).

The neoliberal trend is clear - from the safeguard mechanisms unlimited use of carbon offsets to the new Nature Laws, where reliance on biodiversity offsets is enshrined.

There is a clear intention to 'stack' Nature Repair Credits on top of native forest ACCUs. Could a pool of 'listed forest species habitat credits' be used to offset damage to 'listed species habitat' in areas available for logging? What would this mean in the bi-lateral agreements that replace the RFA's?

Any form of offsets from public native forests should be a line in the sand for the Greens.

2. Forest carbon offsets

The INFM plan by the NSW government comes with an ultimatum. The Great Koala National Park will only be created if the government can profit from carbon credits.

It must be rejected. When there are so many direct economic benefits from creating national parks and ending native forest logging, what is this really about? It's about governments being able to monetise carbon and help state supported big emitters comply with the safeguard mechanism.

INFM is the first NF ACCU cab off the rank - innocuously generating offsets through ceasing logging (forest protection) in even small areas of an INFM project. The next NF ACCU cab will encompass at least some elements of a proposed industry method – the most likely being forest thinning. The industry goal is to ensure that thinning in all tenures can generate carbon credits which would cover the cost of doing so and provide the wood volumes needed to feed large scale energy generation. An industry method could be available in the next 12 months. Governments will then have a choice – generate credits through ceasing logging or through thinning or some combination of both – compounding the difficulty of ending native forest logging.

An industry method could easily be utilised in Victoria and Western Australia. 'Thinning', in the name of improving forest health and increasing carbon sequestration, could be applied in any tenure. Credits would be generated not by reducing logging but by purporting to demonstrate improvements in net carbon stock over a specified time. The logging industry also claims thinning improves forest ecosystem resilience and fire suppression and reduces the risk of losing forest carbon to the atmosphere.

The INFM method does not prevent an industry method it opens the door. Preventing it means sending governments a loud message that ACCU's from public native forests are more political trouble than they are worth.

3. Science based policy change

Stopping logging reduces the risks to forest carbon stocks from threats that are increasing with climate change, especially drought and fire. But pretending forest carbon can offset fossil fuel emissions is scientific nonsense.

Current policy settings on carbon offsets are not science based. This is not just about Australia's over reliance on offsets to meet its emissions reduction targets, it's also about the need to adopt a science-based approach to sectoral goals and targets.

Science tells us that we must do everything possible to keep forest carbon and fossil carbon out of the atmosphere but that carbon sequestration in forests and fossil fuel emissions are not equivalent. A big portion of a ton of CO₂ emitted today persists in the atmosphere for millennia. But only a small portion of a ton of CO₂ drawn down today by a forest ends up safely stored in the deep ocean sediment where it can reasonably be equated with the stability of carbon stored in geological deposits.

The ability of forests to retain carbon stocks, their most important climate mitigation value, is dependent on being able to do two things simultaneously: rapidly reduce emissions from fossil fuels and rapidly improve the ecological integrity of forests. **They are interdependent goals that must not be traded off against each other. We cannot save forests or the climate unless we do both.**

SIGNATORIES TO THE ABOVE STATEMENT

Gumbaynggirr elders, Indigenous community of the Mid North Coast of NSW

1. Uncle Gary Williams
2. Aunty Alison Buchanan
3. Uncle Micklo Jarrett
4. Aunty Yvette Pacey.
5. Uncle Allan Phillips (Dorrigo Plateau clan)

Conservation Groups

6. Australians for Animals Inc
7. ACF Community Canberra
8. ACF Community Forest Alliance Victoria
9. Australian Forest and Climate Alliance
10. Australian Religious Response to Climate Change
11. Australian Rainforest Conservation Society
12. Australian Wildlife Society
13. Ballarat Wildlife Rehabilitation & Conservation
14. Bellingen Nature Company
15. Bellingen Environment Centre (BEC)
16. Blue Rock Rainforest Collective (Dorrigo Plateau)
17. Blinks River Guardians
18. The Bob Brown Foundation
19. Cadman & Norwood Environmental Consulting
20. Canberra Forest Alliance
21. Central West Environment Council
22. Environment East Gippsland Inc.
23. Eating our way to Extinction
24. Forest Ecology Alliance (FEA)
25. Friends of Alberton West Forest
26. Friends of Coffs Coast Koalas
27. Friends of Conglomerate
28. Friends of Dorrigo Koalas
29. Friends of Kalang Headwaters
30. Friends of Newry
31. Friends of Orara
32. Friends of Scotchman
33. Friends of Tarkeeth Koalas
34. Friends of Tuckers Nob
35. Hands Off Qamby Bluff
36. Householders Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE) Inc.
37. Inland Rivers Network
38. Knitting Nannas Coffs Harbour Loop (KNCHL)
39. Kalang Land Environment Action Network (KLEAN)
40. Koala Action Inc.

41. Koala Action Gympie
42. Koala Clancy Foundation
43. Lighter Footprints
44. Lithgow Environment Group Inc.
45. Magnetic Island Koala Hospital
46. Mornington Peninsula Koala Conservation
47. Native Animal Rescue
48. Nillumbik Climate Action Team
49. Northern Rivers Climate Justice Alliance
50. Sustainable Earth Projects Ltd
51. Save Sydney Koalas
52. Tasmanian Conservation Trust
53. The Peoples Climate Assembly
54. Victorian Forest Alliance
55. Western Australian Forest Alliance
56. Wilderness Australia

Individual Signatories

57. Ashley Love, Life member, Bellingen Environment Centre & “father” of the GKNP
58. Christine Milne, AO, former leader of the Tasmanian and Australian Greens
59. Marg Blakers, Co-founder of the Victorian Greens, Adviser to Senator Bob Brown, Organiser of the first Global Greens Congress, first Convener of the Global Greens
60. Peter Prineas, OAM, Ex-chair NCC, first Executive officer of NPA, NSW

...and 20 more individuals.