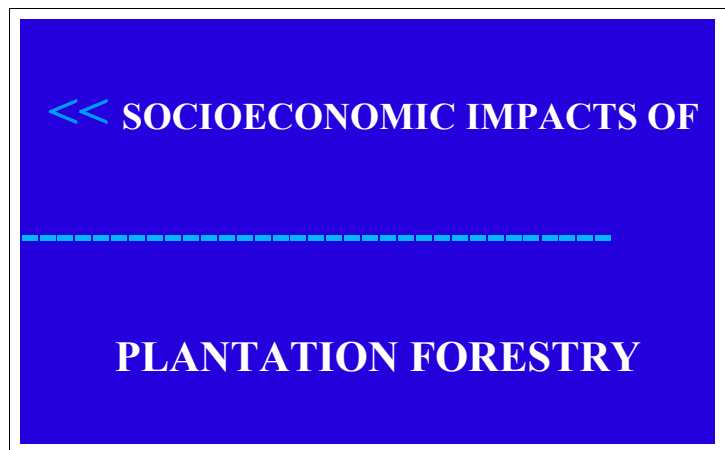
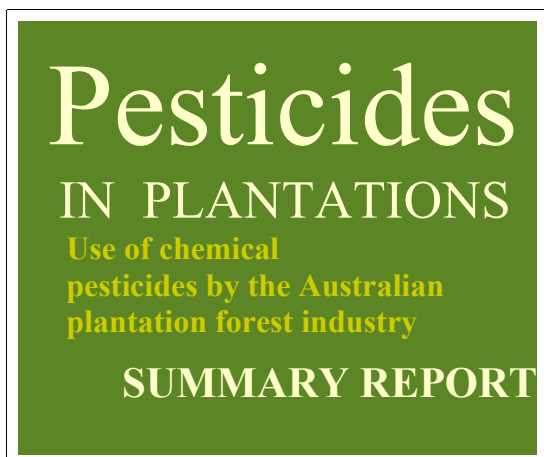
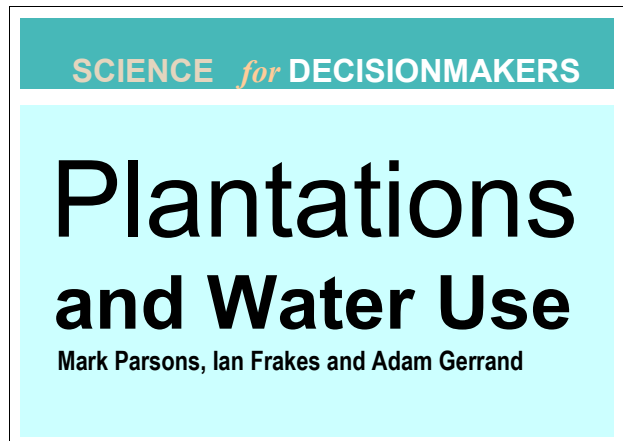
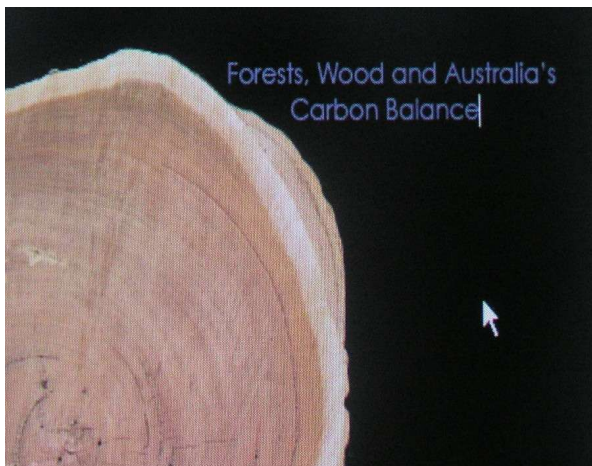


# PLANTATIONS

## ARE OUR POLITICIANS LISTENING?

On the 31<sup>st</sup> March the Clarence Environment Centre wrote to the Federal Minister for Forests and Agriculture, The Hon Mr. Tony Burke, attaching a ten page critical assessment of Commonwealth Government documents posted on their website. A copy of that letter follows (pages 2- 3 below). Among the documents reviewed were:



Our assessment outlined no less than 17 negative issues (see page 4 below), economic, social and environmental, relating to the current trend with plantation forestry in the Clarence Valley.

We finally received a response to our concerns six weeks later from a Mr Allen Grant (page 5 below), contradicting our claims of widespread loss of biodiversity, and entirely ignored our concerns about chemical pollution; human health; social disruption; economic impacts; climate change outcomes, and inadequate legislation. Mr Grant also attempted to downplay the impacts by quoting 2005 statistics and claiming the majority of plantations were being established to supply sawlogs.

Our unsympathetic response can be read on pages 6-7.

John Edwards (Hon Secretary)



## CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

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Date: 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008

The Hon Mr. Tony Burke MP  
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests  
Parliament House  
Canberra  
ACT

Dear Mr Burke

### **Plantation Forestry, a looming disaster**

The Clarence Environment Centre has been active in the Grafton district of northern NSW for two decades, and has recently undertaken considerable research into the plantation forest industry which has expanded rapidly here on the North Coast over the past eight to ten years. There has been a groundswell of concern amongst environmentalists and some farmer groups in relation to these mainly eucalypt monocultures, which must now total as much as one hundred thousand hectares.

Our wide range of concerns cover the entire triple bottom line - environmental, social and economic issues, from the clear-felling and burning of remnant forests and habitat trees; to decimated rural communities as families sell their land and move on; to the loss of income to rural businesses that traditionally service the agricultural sector.

The environmental concerns arise mainly from the hopelessly inadequate NSW Plantations and Reafforestation Act 1999 (P&RA), which code of practice has been under review for over three years. However, the overwhelming majority of plantations in our area are managed investment funds that rely entirely on Federal Government tax concessions.

These plantations are being established mainly for wood chip, and will be clear felled on a 15 year rotation. They are not forests. They have almost zero biodiversity; spraying regimes prevent the formation of wildlife habitat, and the cocktail of chemicals being used, many of which have been banned overseas, will ultimately lead to disaster.

As part of our research, we undertook a brief review of numerous documents released by the Federal Government in recent years. It appears the plantation industry have had a disproportionate say in the presentation of these documents in a similar way the 'Greenhouse Mafia' infiltrated the decision-making process in relation to climate change policy during the latter years of the Howard era.

There needs to be a major overhaul of the entire system. No one can argue against the need to plant trees, but what is happening here is negating any possible benefits in terms of carbon sinks through growing trees, and is plainly unsustainable.

The Clarence Environment Centre has also contacted your counterpart in the Department of Environment, and provided a copy to our local member, The Hon Janelle Saffin MLA, who appears to share our concerns and has been most supportive.

Please find a CD enclosed containing our review of the federal government's plantation brochures.

We hope you can work together with the Minister for Environment, and possibly the taxation department to enable a better outcome in relation to growth of forests in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary



**A series of 200 metre long, burned out, windrows containing old-growth trees on this plantation near Lawrence in the Clarence Valley, clearly shows the extent of vegetation loss and carbon emissions created during plantation establishment.**

**Economic issues:**

- As traditional rural industries decline, that flow on effect is felt by a range of rural related industries, from farm machinery sales to abattoirs, veterinary surgeons to stock transport.
- The significant cost of upgrades to rural roads and bridges to accommodate the increase in heavy transport, becomes the responsibility of local councils, and thus to local ratepayers who see little benefit in return.
- The cost of land preparation, plantation management, and transport of wood-chip to export ports is expensive, not only in dollar terms, but in the enormous amount of greenhouse gas emissions.
- Doubts have been cast on the efficacy of many of these managed investment funds, and doubts about the potential returns to investors. Some plantations have already been bulldozed for poor performance and replanted, possibly to obtain further tax concessions.
- Overseas experience shows that plantations change soil structure so that rotational cropping has proved to be unsustainable. In some parts of Australia, even a second crop is not possible.

**Environmental issues:**

- The Plantations and Reafforestation Act currently allows the removal of all remnant forest under one hectare in size; and all 'irregular projections' from forest edges, with no stipulation as to a minimum area that can be removed in the process. Only one habitat tree for each hectare cleared needs to be retained somewhere nearby, all of which greatly reduces habitat and biodiversity.
- Trees planted are invariably alien to the area, requiring chemical fertilizers to sustain growth. Runoff of these nutrients into waterways contributes to algal blooms in dry times, and fish kills in de-oxygenated water following heavy rain events.
- Because plantations are monocultures, they attract a variety of insect pests and diseases, requiring chemical control, leading to pollution, not only of the soil, but of all waterways downstream, again leading to an overall loss of biodiversity.
- Young vigorous growth in Eucalypt plantations is known to use excessive water, impacting on local creek and river flows which can be reduced by as much as 50%.
- The interception of large volumes of run-off water, contributes to the retention of salt, and potentially leads to land degradation through salinity.
- As with all soil disturbance, the land clearing for plantations contributes to erosion and siltation of wetlands and waterways.

**Social impacts:**

- Large-scale plantation development within rural communities sees a significant increase in unemployment, following an initial short term increase in casual employment during the planting phase, mainly undertaken by backpackers or other itinerant workers.
- The decline of rural populations has negative implications for amenities such as country schools.
- There are a number of documented incidents of residents being directly hit by chemical spray drift, with obvious implications for human health over both the short and long term.
- The proliferation of unattractive, single species, plantations, sometimes planted within metres of private homes, significantly reduces the quality of life for many living in rural areas.
- There are hundreds of millions around the world living with hunger, either because of famine, or because they can no longer afford the inflated prices of food caused by competition for biofuels, This poses a serious ethical dilemma about planting food-producing land to trees, simply to provide paper, or biofuels that enable rich people to continue driving cars, and polluting the atmosphere.

\* \* \*



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Mr John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary  
Clarence Environment Centre  
29-31 Skinner Street  
GRAFTON NSW 2460

Dear Mr Edwards

Thank you for your correspondence of 31 March 2008 to the Hon. Tony Burke MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry about plantation forestry. Minister Burke has asked me to reply on his behalf and I apologise for the delay in responding.

To 2005, the area of commercial timber plantations in the Clarence River catchment was about 24,500 hectares, about 1.1% of the total catchment area. In comparison, about 68% of the catchment is native forests and woodlands and 23% is grazing and cropland. In the north coast New South Wales region (from the Queensland border to south of the Hunter Valley) the total plantation area to 2007 is estimated to be about 82,000 hectares. Most of the plantations in this region are intended primarily for sawlog production.

I will pass your analysis of the two Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS) publications on to the Bureau. The reports contribute to the scientific debate on plantation water use and socio-economic changes brought about by plantation development. I am pleased to confirm that all BRS publications are subject to appropriate internal and external review. The publication *Plantations and Water Use* was reviewed by departmental staff responsible for water resources and forest industry policy. It was also reviewed by an internationally recognised expert in catchment hydrology based at CSIRO Land and Water.

Hydrological research shows that, when the trees fully cover the site, eucalypt plantations are likely to use a similar amount of water to native forests. Grasslands in the north coast region of New South Wales probably use around two megalitres per hectare per year less water than plantations or native forests.

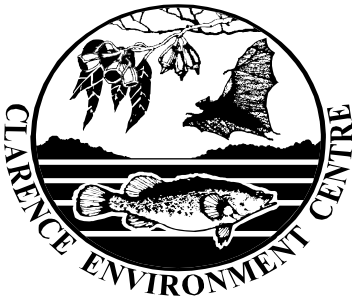
Studies have shown that plantations have a greater biodiversity than open agricultural and grazing land. For example, eucalypt plantations were examined at 105 sites in Victoria, along with nearby sites in farmland and remnant native forest. The study showed that plantations support higher densities of forest birds than cleared farmland and slightly lower levels than native forest. Biodiversity values of certain eucalypt plantations contributed to a number of plantations being included in the protected reserves network of northern New South Wales.

18 Marcus Clarke Street Canberra City ACT GPO Box 858 Canberra ACT 2601 ph +61 2 6272 3933 fax +61 6272 5161 [www.daff.gov.au](http://www.daff.gov.au) AIN/24 113 085 695

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Signed Mr Allen Grant  
Executive Manager  
Fisheries and Forestry Division  
Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
Dated 17<sup>th</sup> May 2008





## CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

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22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008

Attn Mr Allen Grant  
Executive Manager  
Fisheries and Forestry Division  
Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
GPO Box 858  
Canberra  
ACT 2601

Dear Mr Grant

### Plantation Forest Industry issues

Thank you for your response to our concerns about plantation forestry in the Clarence Valley. However, we point out that your quoted 2005 figure of 24,000 hectares of plantations in the Clarence River catchment, is now closer to 100,000 hectares. Also, while the initial plantation estate was primarily soft wood for sawlogs, the majority of new plantations are hardwood species, planted specifically for wood-chip production, and funded by a majority of Australian taxpayers, through Federal Government tax concessions to those burdened by excessive profits.

Our assertions are backed by your Bureau of Rural Sciences publication, "Australia's plantation log supply 2005 – 2049", 2007, stating (page 3): *"Forecast supply in 2010 comprises hardwood pulpwood (46%), softwood sawlogs (35%), softwood pulpwood (18%) and hardwood sawlogs (1%)."* (See also Figure 4 on Page 8).

By 2010 therefore, less than 3% of all hardwood plantations, will provide sawlogs, the remaining 97% will be chipped, contradicting your claim that: ***"Most plantations in this region (north coast NSW) are intended primarily for sawlog production."***

Finally, we also take issue with your claim that, *"Studies have shown that plantations have a greater biodiversity than open agricultural and grazing land."* We would very much like to see a copy of those studies for thorough analysis.

We accept that some plantations, particularly those grown for long term sawlog production, may have higher biodiversity than agricultural land which, by definition, is probably cultivated with a single crop, sprayed to kill all insect life. However, we consider it immoral to establish plantations on food-producing land with 450 million people around the world facing starvation.

Likewise we accept that plantation biodiversity may be greater than that on some 'cleared' grazing land. However, the monoculture plantations being established here are being planted on land that was not totally cleared. The Plantations and Reafforestation Act allows that by requiring plantations be established, ***"on land that was predominately non forest prior to 1<sup>st</sup> January 1990"***, allowing 18 year old regrowth trees to be bulldozed.

Bear in mind that the plantation trees will be harvested at between 10 and 15 years. Why therefore is 18 year old regrowth burned and not wood-chipped? The answer is clear; it is not commercially viable, and government subsidies and tax concessions are only available for planting trees. This then begs the question: Are these wood-chip plantations commercially viable given they compete with multi-nationals that are clear-felling forests around the world, including Australia, with no plantation management costs.

Further, the Act allows remnant vegetation less than a hectare in size to be removed. Also: *“The Director-General may authorise the clearing of irregular projections from any patch within that provision if: (i) the clearing is to improve the functional design of the plantation, and (ii) not more than 10% of the patch is so authorised to be cleared.”*

Exemptions within the Act also allows the required leaving of one habitat tree per hectare to be overturned providing 10 or 20 seedlings (depending on the size of tree removed) are allowed to regenerate naturally in their place. According to Department of Primary Industry insiders, there are no staff available to monitor compliance with these regulations.

No doubt you can understand our frustration at old growth trees and large numbers of remnant forest patches disappearing from the landscape, being burned and further adding to CO2 pollution.

It must be understood that biodiversity consists of more than birds. We examined one plantation and found that exotic weeds, that proliferated following soil disturbance prior to tree planting, outnumbered native species by 7 to 1. We also assert that the annual pesticide spraying required to combat insects and disease that plague monoculture plantations, ensures that biodiversity, including birds, is kept to an absolute minimum for the life of the plantation, a cycle that is to be repeated over and over, polluting our wetlands, creeks, rivers, and ultimately the ocean.

Ongoing, high-level use of chemicals has already resulted in neighbouring properties being impacted by spray drift, killing vegetation and forcing landowners to disconnect downpipes to their water tanks in an attempt to prevent contamination of their drinking water supplies. This is entirely unacceptable, and must be stopped.

We believe our local Member, The Hon Ms Janelle Saffin, who is equally concerned over the level of pesticide use, will speak with the Minister on this issue, and we ask that you also pass on our concerns to him in the strongest possible terms.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards  
Hon Secretary.

Copy to Minister Bourke  
Copy to Member for Page, the Hon Ms Janelle Saffin  
Copy of letters posted on CEC website.