



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Australia**

## **Submission to the Agriculture, land and emissions: discussion paper**

**Prepared January 3 2024 by Alana Mountain**

Friends of the Earth Australia thanks the government for the opportunity to make a submission for the Land and Agricultural Sectoral Plan. As a grassroots organisation dedicated to social and environmental justice, we have a specific interest in seeing transformative policy reform to improve the overall health of our natural environment, climate and land use.

The emissions and sequestration associated with activity in agriculture and the land make up a significant part of Australia's, and the world's, greenhouse gas emissions. As noted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2018) reducing those emissions and increasing carbon stored in the land is an important part of stabilising global temperatures.

We recognise that there are multiple social and economic barriers to reducing emissions, fuelling climate change and preventing the creation of new carbon stores in agriculture and the land. The current economic system is fundamentally inequitable - capitalism is built on the exploitation of land and labour and the endless pursuit of profit (as opposed to livelihood).

Australia's climate commitments are seriously undermined by its reliance on carbon credits to meet emissions reductions targets. The Safeguard Mechanism currently allows emitters to offset 100 percent of their emissions through the purchase of carbon credits, and according to the Australia Institute, as much as 80 percent of credits are 'junk', leading to very little or no real carbon sequestration at all. This is simply a false solution and we seek to promote solutions that are equitable and support people and the planet, not big business.

In solidarity with the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, we amplify the key recommendations of their submission which has been attached. Our submission seeks to promote community led and agroecology solutions to remedy the current industrial agricultural context we exist under. Australians care about the way their food is produced and how and where they can access it, with a growing awareness of its social, environmental, and economic impacts. Nutritious food produced and distributed in

socially-just, ethical and ecologically-sound ways is increasingly in demand.

We promote solutions that are transformative, regenerative and grounded in the best available, peer reviewed science and Traditional knowledge systems. We encourage the Australian government to respond to the recommendations as a matter of urgency in order to limit global warming to 1.5C and satisfy the findings and recommendations of the IPCC report March 2023. The report recognises the interdependence of climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, and human societies; the value of diverse forms of knowledge; and the close linkages between climate change adaptation, mitigation, ecosystem health, human well-being and sustainable development, and reflects the increasing diversity of actors involved in climate action.

It is the responsibility of the Australian government to take meaningful steps to genuinely address the climate crisis and radically improve the land and agriculture sector.

### **Key areas identified for improvement:**

#### **1. Woodlands, forests and habitat**

Australia's forests are some of the most carbon-dense forests in the world. They are the most biologically productive ecosystems on Earth for sequestering carbon and are an important part of the global carbon cycle. The continued industrial clearing of vegetation, woodlands and native forests poses a threat to the country's best available and natural carbon sink asset.

Recently, the state governments of Victoria and Western Australia have promised to end clear-fell logging. This is an easy and immediate solution that will allow forests to aid in global carbon drawdown efforts which are essential to preventing catastrophic climate change. It will also afford forests the opportunity to heal from the wounds caused by decades of over extraction. Continuing to log forests places them at risk of ecological collapse in a climate crisis. Ending logging in Australia's public native forests could prevent 9 million tonnes of carbon pollution from being emitted each year.

**THAT'S AROUND 255 MILLION TONNES OF CO<sub>2</sub>E THAT COULD BE PREVENTED FROM ENTERING THE ATMOSPHERE FROM NOW UNTIL 2050.**

That's equivalent to:



**TAKING EVERY CAR OFF  
THE ROAD IN  
AUSTRALIA FOR OVER  
TO 3.5 YEARS**



**CONVERTING 900,000  
AUSTRALIAN HOMES TO  
SOLAR**



**SHUTTING DOWN  
AUSTRALIA'S DIRTIEST  
POWER PLANT, 28  
YEARS EARLY**



**SHUTTING DOWN AN  
AVERAGE HUNTER VALLEY  
MINE 16 YEARS EARLY**

Source: Dr Jennifer Sanger, Carbon Benefit from protecting Australia's public native forests, Great Tree Project

**We require urgent action from the Federal government to:**

- Strengthen environmental laws and reform the Environmental Protection Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act
- Terminate all Regional Forest Agreements
- Place a national ban on native forest logging and profit-driven vegetation clearing
- Put in place lasting protections, and empower Traditional Owners in land management and stewardship
- Support state governments to invest in regional jobs for the care, management and ecological restoration of public land as well as appropriate nature-based tourism
- Ensure greater transparency and accountability of activities in forests related to management such as thinning, fire management and other industrial activities

Biodiverse and intact forests are critical for the safeguarding of our global food systems. We need to immediately protect and restore native forests and value them for the critical role they play in a rapidly changing climate.

Protecting Australia's forests is a low-cost, immediate and effective way to reduce emissions. Australia's forests represent important carbon stores. By ending native forest logging nationally, we can prevent large amounts of carbon from being released into the atmosphere, contributing to the climate crisis. Protecting Australia's native forests is real action on climate change.

## **2. Agriculture**

We would like to direct the government to the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) submission, giving our full support for the recommendations provided within their response.

We would like to hi-light this part of the submission in response to the questions surrounding a need for higher ambition in the discussion paper:

*1. What are the opportunities to reduce emissions and build carbon stores in agriculture and the land? What are the main barriers to action?*

*2. How can we progress emission reduction efforts whilst also building resilience and adapting to climate change?*

Section 1 of the discussion paper acknowledges the need for higher ambition to tackle climate change, and yet focuses on opportunities for increased trade and higher productivity, which are fundamentally incompatible with reducing emissions.

For example, on page 6, the discussion paper notes that the impacts of climate change will include:

more frequent and severe natural disasters, localised changes to growing regions, and heightened biosecurity risks (IPCC 2023; ABARES 2022a).

These impacts will produce the following:

- More frequent and severe natural disasters will continue to severely impact on the functioning of long supply chains, elucidating the need to localise food systems rather than increasing commodity trade and exports;
- Localised changes to growing regions will make monocultures even more vulnerable, elucidating the need for diversified production models rather than more intensive ones; and
- Heightened biosecurity risks lead to devastating losses of livestock and crops, and increased risk to human health from zoonotic diseases, elucidating the need for greater diversity of genetic resources for food and agriculture rather than merely greater monitoring and surveillance as is common in industrial biosecurity ideology.

Livestock currently contribute two thirds of agricultural GHG emissions. There is an urgent need for a reduction in the production of livestock in order to reduce these emissions, and a necessary aspect of achieving these reductions is for the government to support regenerative agricultural practices which will aid in building climate resilience for regional communities.

*“Rather than promoting technocratic false solutions to problems in the food system, we should instead: reduce waste by producing food closer to where it is consumed; promote diversity in food production, processing and distribution; decentralise and move away from chemical-intensive farming; and address governance barriers to equitable distribution of food”. (AFSA Submission to the Agriculture and Land Sectoral Plan 2023)*

AFSA asserts that ‘net zero’ is a fundamentally low ambition, designed to allow emitters to continue emitting. The Nature Repair Market (NPM) is a deeply flawed approach to heal nature. Nature-based solutions such as those embedded in the NPM are more accurately described by the food sovereignty movement as ‘nature-based dispossessions’ as they enable agribusiness to claim large amounts of land, forest and water from smallholders and Indigenous Peoples, particularly in the Global South.

Concepts such as ‘nature-positive’ and ‘net zero’ are a weak measure for reducing emissions and halting biodiversity loss, where viewing nature through the lens of economics assumes that fossil fuel emissions can be permanently absorbed in equal amounts in forests, soil and oceans.

We endorse the following key recommendations:

- Allocate funding to support action research and farmer-led innovation in agroecology through bodies such as CSIRO;
- Create policies that support young, aspiring agroecology-oriented farmers to access land for the long term with affordability and secure tenure as a core driving value, alongside grants and resources to establish their innovative farming enterprises;
- Develop and support transdisciplinary research conducted through platforms that foster co-learning between practitioners and researchers, and horizontal dissemination of

experience among practitioners (e.g. farmer-to-farmer networks, communities of practice and agroecological beacons);

- Ensure that educational programs for agricultural extension and climate policy makers are promoting horizontal learning processes and democratically-determined use of appropriate technologies, as well as a better understanding of the role of agroecological practices for its transformative approach towards reducing emissions;
- Address power imbalances and conflicts of interest in relation to the generation, validation and communication of knowledge about agroecological farming practises and policies, by valuing different sources of knowledge and bridging gaps between knowledge generated and transmitted through Indigenous Peoples and social movements on the one hand, and the scientific sector on the other;
- Prioritise strengthening and building capacity into local and regional markets over export ones;
- Implement policies that support and promote the innovation of diversified, sustainable, equitable markets that enhance connections between producers and eaters;
- Seek First Peoples participation in every decision-making process that might impact them;
- Enact stricter regulation around clear-felling in agricultural land use zones as well as increasing incentives and opportunities to plant trees on farms;
- Promote agroecology dialogues/lighthouses/beacons (farmer to farmer knowledge exchanges, farm tours, resource and tools sharing);
- Legislate Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights to ensure the protection of First Peoples' traditional knowledge;
- Fund agroecology farming courses and develop new resources to empower aspiring farmers to grow food following agroecology principles;
- Promote low-tech initiatives adapted to small and medium scale agroecological farming which are useful, accessible and sustainable
- Introduce a Universal Basic Income to ensure everyone can afford food produced by agroecology-oriented farms.

*“AFSA emphasises the notion that First Peoples, farmers and local communities already have an acute understanding about changes to the landscapes that they care for. Agroecology is the culmination of traditional knowledge shared over millennia between First Peoples, farmers and other food producers, which must be protected and upheld in the development of climate change plans and policies”. (AFSA Submission to the Agriculture and Land Sectoral Plan 2023).*

## **Conclusion**

Determining Australia's land and agriculture sectoral plan requires deep consultation in local and regional communities most affected by the impacts of climate change. False solutions such as a 'Nature Repair Market' and a 'Carbon Credit Scheme' will not adequately address the fundamental and systemic issues which are failing the Australian people and our urgent need to reduce emissions in order to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Our food systems are broken, we have over extracted and over exploited nature and the soils which provide life and nourishment. We need community led solutions rooted in justice for land, water and people. We urge the government to radically address the concerns outlined here and respond meaningfully by implementing the key recommendations.