

23rd March 2009

Senate Standing Committee on

Environment, Communications and the Arts

Via email to: eca.sen@aph.gov.au

Submission for
Inquiry into forestry and mining operations on the Tiwi Islands

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comment concerning your inquiry into forestry and mining on the Tiwi Islands.

About the Submitter

The School for Environmental Research (SER) is a research institute operating within the Institute of Advanced Studies at Charles Darwin University. The School is a multi-disciplinary institute which investigates the northern Australia environment and similar climatic regions globally, with an emphasis on Southeast Asia. Scientists within each group work together on projects, examining environmental issues from many different perspectives.

Alternative economic opportunities

A recent paper published by scientists from SER said that, until recently, there were opportunities to pursue reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD) on 4200 hectares of Tiwi Islands forest. The paper estimated that the Tiwi Islands forests that were logged by Great Southern Plantations in 2008 could have been worth up to \$110 million under a REDD scheme under the Gold Standard of the voluntary carbon market.

We understand that the Tiwi Land Council remains supportive of the ongoing expansion of the commercial forestry industry on the islands, via the company Great Southern Plantations. However, we recommend the inquiry determine why Tiwi Islanders appear to have been denied the opportunity to benefit from REDD opportunities. It appears to have been a huge opportunity lost – both by the company and by the islanders. We think this is because of the way in which Great Southern finance their operations – that the tax savings available under a Managed Investment Scheme could only be attained if the forests were felled.

We believe it would be valuable for the Senate Inquiry to investigate whether the economic gain proposed by future forestry permits can be matched or bettered through REDD schemes. Such schemes can benefit Tiwi Islanders economically and environmentally by putting a dollar value on ecosystem services, such as providing carbon storage, clean water and diversity of life.

As further context for your Inquiry, please find attached the aforementioned paper 'Seeing REDD: Issues, principles and possible opportunities in northern Australia'.

Kind Regards,

Stephen Garnett

Director

School for Environmental Research