

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 170
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 2
Programme: Climate Change and Renewable Energy Division
Topic: SLATS vs NGGI landclearing data
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Question Date:
Question Type: Written

Senator Waters asked:

1. There is considerable inconsistency between Queensland's SLATS data and the Department's NGGI data for landclearing – can you please explain the differences in methodology which might have led to that discrepancy?
2. What are the other factors which the Department attributes this discrepancy to?

Answer:

The Department does not agree that the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory data for land clearing and the Queensland's SLATS program are inconsistent. Differences between the two datasets can be explained by differences in the policy intent, scope and purpose of the two monitoring programs.

For reporting under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and under the Kyoto Protocol, the definition of forest land used by the Department of Environment includes all lands with a tree height of at least 2 meters with a canopy crown cover of 20 per cent or more and a minimum forest area of 0.2 ha. This approach is consistent with the definition of forest used in reporting by the Australian Government to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation.

The Queensland Government SLATS program, on the other hand, is designed to estimate changes in all detectable perennial woody vegetation of any height.

Further, there are differences in satellite data processing methods between the two systems.

The Department of the Environment's national land cover program uses satellite data supplied by Geoscience Australia. The data processing methods were developed by CSIRO.

The SLATS program uses satellite data obtained from the US Geological Survey and relies on classification methods developed by the Queensland Government.

Both the programs use different approaches to calibrate canopy cover data. The Department of the Environment's national land cover program uses aerial photographs and high resolution satellite imagery to calibrate satellite data. The SLATS program uses field data to classify satellite data.

The other key factor that would contribute to the differences between the two systems is the accounting rules set out by the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the IPCC guidelines. The Department applies UNFCCC accounting rules to identify permanent change in land use whereas the SLATS program identifies changes in land cover.