



INQUIRY INTO LEGISLATION UNDERPINNING CARBON SINK FORESTS

SUBMISSION

To

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

Prepared by:-

Organisation: The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc)

President: Mr Mike Norton

Address: Ground Floor
28 Thorogood Street
BURSWOOD WA 6100

Postal Address: PO Box 6291
EAST PERTH WA 6892

Phone: (08) 9486 2100

Facsimile: (08) 9361 3544

Email: andymcmillan@wafarmers.org.au

Contact Name: Andy McMillan

Title: Director of Policy

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Background

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc) (WAFarmers) is WA's largest and most influential rural lobby and service organisation.

WAFarmers represents approximately 3,500 Western Australian farmers from a range of primary industries including grain growers, meat and wool producers, horticulturalists, dairy farmers, commercial egg producers and beekeepers.

It is estimated that collectively our members are major contributors to the \$5.9 billion gross value of production (2005/06 – ABS, WA Agri-Food Industry Outlook – December 2007) that agriculture in its various forms contributes to Western Australia's economy.

Additionally, through differing forms of land tenure, our members own, control and capably manage many millions of hectares of the State's land mass and as such are responsible for maintaining the productive capacity and environmental well being of that land.

Introduction

WAFarmers welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Senate standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport's *Inquiry into legislation underpinning carbon sink forests*.

WAFarmers notes that the Senate referred the matter to the Standing Committee 3 weeks before the release of the government's *Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) Green Paper* and questions the relevance of the Inquiry in the light of the "brave new world" of carbon sequestration as detailed in the Green Paper.

With the government committing to a program of extensive consultation with the agricultural sector leading up to the coverage of agriculture under the CPRS in 2015, WAFarmers considers that it would be short sighted in the extreme for the government to proceed with legislatively supporting carbon sink forests in isolation.

Nevertheless, the following comments are provided for the consideration of the Standing Committee.

Carbon sink forests

Indications from the Green Paper are that carbon sink forests are defined as "forests planted for the purpose of permanently storing carbon." Given this definition and a favourable legislative environment providing financial incentives for the establishment of carbon sink forests, WAFarmers is extremely concerned at the potential for the permanent loss of massive tracts of prime productive agricultural land to carbon sink forests.



Accordingly, WAFarmers believes that in the path forward as determined in the green paper, carbon sink forests can not be treated in isolation. Carbon sequestration in alternative agricultural commodities such as grain crops and pastures and by products such as bio-char need to be recognised and given equitable consideration in legislated incentive programs to enable farmers to maintain viable traditional farming enterprises.

From a farming perspective, formal recognition of environmental stewardship over remnant native vegetation should also be incorporated into future government policy incorporating incentives for carbon sinks.

Favourable treatment of the forestry sector will also deliver perverse outcomes in that plantation forests are also considered threats to fragile water tables and aquifers and due to poor management often harbour feral pests and weeds which threaten the viability of neighbouring farming enterprises through competition for pasture feed, livestock losses through predation and crop/improved pasture weed contamination.

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