

**EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY 11 OCTOBER 2010**

## **Carbon sink forestry planning 'haphazard and inadequate'**

**There is no comprehensive development approval or government planning process associated with carbon sink forestry, despite the fact that some projections indicate that the area of land planted to these forests might exceed the total area of Australian crop land over the next thirty years.**

This is the key finding of a research report released by the Australian Farm Institute, examining the potential future impact of carbon sink forestry development on demand for agricultural land. The research was carried out by GHD Hassall, with the support of the National Climate Change Research Strategy for Primary Industry (CCRSPI).

The researchers examined modelling that has been carried out to date by groups such as ABARE and the CSIRO of the likely future extent of carbon sink forestry. Projections of the future extent of carbon sink plantations vary depending on a wide range of factors and are very uncertain. However, with some future projections under certain assumptions ranging as high as 25 million hectares, and with carbon sink plantations required to be maintained for up to 100 years, there is clearly a need to get the planning right before proceeding too far.

This is particularly important as modelling shows that carbon sink plantations are likely to be the main domestic offset available to reduce net Australian greenhouse emissions over the next 20 to 30 years, until new low-carbon technologies emerge.

The researchers examined the development approval processes associated with carbon sink forestry, in order to better understand how potential environmental and socioeconomic impacts are considered.

The researchers concluded that;

*'None of the States or Territories has a specific approvals process for carbon sink plantations. Only two of the States actually recognise in their planning legislation the potential for trees to be planted for their carbon benefits. However, in these States, as in the remainder, a proposal for a carbon sink plantation will be subject to the same approvals process as a proposal for a commercial timber plantation.'*

*'The approval processes vary quite significantly between the States and Territories. In some, the approving authority is centralised at the State or Territory level, which gives some consistency across the jurisdiction, but, in others, the approval is left to local government bodies, with resulting danger of inconsistency across the State.'*

*'Approval processes differ significantly in the impacts considered. Few give any consideration to possible socioeconomic impacts and only Western Australia requires consideration of the impacts of the loss of prime agricultural land. None require the consideration of the regional impacts of plantation development.'*

The researchers make a series of recommendations about changes to planning processes to more adequately ensure that both positive and negative impacts of carbon sink forestry are given full consideration, and that there is some consistency in planning between jurisdictions.

'Given that carbon sink forestry will be virtually the only available emission offset for major emitters for the foreseeable future, and that the resulting demand for land suitable for plantations is likely to be high in some regions, it is essential that proper planning processes are implemented in advance,' said Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

**A preview copy of the Research Report *The Implications of Greenhouse Mitigation Policies on the Demand for Agricultural Land* is [available here](#).**

*Ends*

Media contact: Mick Keogh – (02) 9690 1388 or 0418 256 066