



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

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Australia's greenhouse gas emissions skyrocket from tree clearing

- Australia's tree-clearing emissions have nearly doubled in three years, increasing 79%
- Queensland's tree-clearing rates have doubled since Newman LNP Government gutted laws
- Tree-clearing emissions could wipe out Turnbull's Emissions Reduction Fund in two years

Tree clearing, a major contributor to climate change, is spiralling out of control again, led by Queensland, the Wilderness Society said today.

Australia's greenhouse gas emissions from tree clearing are also skyrocketing, with land-sector emissions almost doubling in the past three years while emissions from most other sectors are dropping. LULUCF (Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry) emissions increased 79 per cent from the equivalent of 13 million tonnes of carbon dioxide in 2012 to 23Mt CO₂e in 2015, more than 10 times faster than any other sector, according to data from the Federal Government's [Tracking to 2020](#) report.

A new report by CO2 Australia estimates that tree-clearing emissions may reach 55 million tonnes a year, about 10 per cent of Australia's entire annual emissions and an almost 50 per cent increase from 37.2Mt in 2013.

"The bulldozers are back in a big way," said Wilderness Society National Director Lyndon Schneiders. "They are ripping up our bushland, killing our native wildlife and are releasing millions of tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. If tree clearing continues at this rate, the emissions could be the equivalent of running another four dirty Hazelwood coal fired power plants.

"The Turnbull Government's climate policy is completely illogical. It does nothing while state government gut laws to allow millions of trees to be ripped up and burnt, then it spends billions of dollars in taxpayers' money trying to keep trees in the ground and planting new trees. If tree clearing continues at current rates, the Turnbull Government's \$2.5 billion Emissions Reduction Fund may run out of money. It would be easier and far cheaper to just stop tree clearing."

"Australia's tree-clearing emissions were dropping until the Newman LNP Government gutted Queensland's tree-clearing laws and unleashed the bulldozers. In the last year of published data, Queensland cleared nearly 300,000 hectares, much more than the entire area of the ACT, in 2013-14."

Queensland's tree clearing has almost doubled in two years, from 153,646 hectares in 2011-12 to 296,324ha in 2013-14, with emissions increasing from 22 million tonnes CO₂e to 36Mt.

"Victoria, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania have also weakened tree-clearing laws, and the Baird Government in NSW is intent on following suit," Mr Schneiders said.

“This is a national tree-clearing crisis that requires strong national action. Having just agreed to the landmark Paris Agreement, the Turnbull Government can not ignore this problem – it must act immediately to ensure a strong national plan is in place to control tree clearing.”

The large increase in tree clearing emissions seriously undermines the centrepiece of the Turnbull Government’s climate policy, the Emissions Reduction Fund.

“The Turnbull Government’s Emissions Reduction Fund has spent about \$670 million of taxpayers’ money for 51 million tonnes of carbon abatement by keeping trees in the ground or planting new ones,” Mr Schneiders said. “Queensland alone will have negated that spending in just 18 months of clearing.

“At the current ERF carbon price, tree clearing emissions could cost up to \$720 million annually. That could negate the remaining \$1.35 billion left in the Emissions Reduction Fund budget in two years.

“Effective regulation would be far more cost efficient than using the Emissions Reduction Fund to deal with tree clearing emissions.”

There are many major tree-clearing proposals on the table including: 500,000 hectares in WA’s Great Western Woodlands for agricultural expansion; 33,000ha across WA and the NT as part of the expansion of the Ord scheme; up to 100,000ha for grazing expansion in the Fitzroy region of WA; and 70,000ha of remaining permits granted for doubtful “High Value Agriculture” projects in Queensland.

“Australia also needs accurate and transparent national standards and reporting of emissions from tree clearing,” Mr Schneiders said. “The current federal government system has inexplicably failed to notice the large increase in tree clearing in Queensland, despite the fact Queensland has a world leading tree clearing monitoring program.”

The Federal Government system only noted that 94,356 hectares of Queensland land was cleared in 2013, while Queensland noted 266,191ha in 2012-13 and 296,324ha in 2013-14. The Queensland Government system also picks up clearing of shrubs (tree communities less than two metres) and cleared areas of less than 200 square metres (the size of a small house block) but that does not explain a difference of nearly 200,000 hectares, or an area 80 per cent of the size of the ACT.

“Queensland either cleared nearly 200,000 hectares of shrubs or a million separate small parcels of land, or there are serious problems with the Australian Government figures,” Mr Schneiders said.

“There is clearly a need for a strong national plan to address the tree clearing crisis, including high quality data and timely reporting across the country.”

For further comment contact:

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For images or video of tree clearing visit <http://bit.ly/1THkSlY>

For a copy of the CO2 report visit www.wilderness.org.au/dozers-need-stop

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