

## **Forests and Climate Change Mitigation**

### **IFA Forestry Policy Statement 6.2**

Forests play a vital role in the removal and storage of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates the development of scientifically based methods to improve climate change mitigation through sustainable forest management. The forestry and timber sectors should be involved in all government initiatives for emissions trading and climate change mitigation schemes.

#### **The Issue**

International recognition of carbon storage and sequestration in forests is encouraging investment in forests. However, complex carbon accounting methods are often needed to assess forest carbon stocks and their changes. If carbon accounting methods are poorly designed, they can create perverse incentives that don't meet sustainable forest management objectives.

Disturbances such as fire and harvesting are raising concerns about potential reversals of forest carbon storage. Mature and old growth native forests store more carbon than younger forests, and if disturbed, these forests can take decades to return to pre-disturbance carbon levels. Further research is needed on the impacts of disturbances over the full life cycle of native forests.

#### **Background**

There is international concern that increases in atmospheric greenhouse gases, mainly due to the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation, could result in climate change. Forests and wood products affect the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere in five main ways:

1. Removing (sequestering) carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through photosynthesis
2. Emitting carbon dioxide when forests or forest products are burned, decay or managed unsustainably
3. Acting as a store (reservoir) of carbon in the biomass of a forest, and in wood products produced
4. Providing low emission biomass as an energy source
5. Providing an alternative to fossil fuel intensive products (such as aluminium, concrete or steel).

#### **Policy**

The IFA supports and encourages:

- International efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with quantitative commitments for emission reduction, particularly in developed countries
- Incentives that recognise the activities and processes through which forests mitigate climate change
- Practical, scientific and transparent methods for accounting carbon storage and carbon fluxes in forests and forest products
- Development of trading opportunities for carbon sequestration and storage benefits through formal compliance and informal voluntary schemes.

The IFA considers that:

- Forest carbon projects should promote sustainable forest management practices
- Forest carbon offsets should be used to supplement, not replace, efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, as well as investment in renewable energy sources
- Efforts should be made to maximise the longevity of forest carbon sequestration and avoidance projects, while recognising that temporary emission reductions are significant (allowing time for investment and development in renewable energy sources and low-emission technologies)
- Increased use of wood products is a legitimate means to mitigate climate change
- Fire management regimes, including prescribed burning, can help prevent large scale bushfires
- Forest carbon trading experience may help to develop markets for other forest environmental services.