

Deforestation failure sounds climate alarm

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Photo: Javier Volcan/Flickr

(PhysOrg.com) -- Australia's failure to accurately measure and predict emissions from deforestation, and the difficulty it has had in reducing deforestation, should send a warning signal to the world, according to a study from The Australian National University.

The research was done by Andrew Macintosh from the Centre for Climate Law and Policy at ANU and published by the [Australia](#) Institute. It looked at the Australian experience with deforestation to highlight some of the risks associated with an international Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and [Forest Degradation](#) (REDD) scheme. It found a raft of pitfalls, including the potential for political manipulation of baseline levels, the difficulty of measuring deforestation emissions and the challenge of controlling deforestation.

“The Australian deforestation experience shows that there is a significant risk that, if deforestation baselines are negotiated, they will be manipulated to generate ‘hot air’ credits - credits that do not represent a reduction in emissions,” said Mr Macintosh.

“Even with the best intentions, it’s very difficult to devise accurate deforestation baselines, creating a risk that the scheme will inadvertently generate hot air credits. It is very difficult to accurately measure deforestation emissions, and any political leader who thinks they can control deforestation simply can’t see the wood for the trees.

“The Australian experience shows how the environmental credibility of an international REDD scheme could be undermined. Australia has one of the most advanced satellite-based monitoring systems in the world and some of the world’s leading forest researchers. Despite this, we have struggled to measure and project deforestation emissions, both of which are vital to the operation of an international scheme,” he said.

Mr Macintosh added that Australia had persuaded the world to allow it to include deforestation emissions in its Kyoto base-year emissions estimates, which had given the country a “free offset” and ensured Australia could meet its Kyoto target with the minimum of effort.

“If deforestation baselines for the REDD scheme are politically negotiated, the same thing could happen,” said Mr Macintosh.

“Developing countries could negotiate overly generous baselines, leading to the issuing of hot air credits that undermine the environmental credibility of the international climate regime.

“The Australian experience with deforestation illustrates how hard it is to reduce deforestation emissions. Australia has struggled to control deforestation for 15 years, despite repeated attempts. This should serve as a warning. If a country like Australia finds it hard to halt [deforestation](#)

, what is the outlook for developing countries with less advanced institutional, governance, monitoring and economic systems?”

More information: The report Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries: A cautionary tale from Australia is available on the Australia Institute website at:

www.tai.org.au

Provided by Australian National University

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