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Forest Regeneration Projects Falling Short In Offsetting Carbon Emissions, Study Finds

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Forest regeneration projects that have received tens of millions of carbon credits and dominate Australia's carbon offset scheme have had negligible impact on woody vegetation cover and carbon sequestration, new research from The Australian National University (ANU) has found.

The research was undertaken in collaboration with Haizea Analytics, University of New South Wales (UNSW) and the University of Queensland, and analysed 182 human-induced regeneration (HIR) projects.

HIR projects are the world's fifth largest nature-based offset type by credit issuances, and the largest when projects involving avoided emissions are excluded.

The analysed projects are mostly located in dry outback areas in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia, and are being credited for regenerating native forests in areas that are largely uncleared.

The projects do not involve any tree planting. They are mainly claiming to regenerate native forests from soil seed stock, and suppressed seedlings, by reducing livestock and feral animal numbers.

The researchers say the projects have been controversial because decades of scientific research in Australia's rangelands suggests grazing by livestock and feral animals generally does not have a material negative impact on woody vegetation cover.

The study assessed if woody vegetation cover increased in the 'credited areas' of the projects, where even-aged forests are supposed to be regenerating, and analysed whether the trends in woody cover in the credited areas were materially different from those in comparison areas adjoining the project boundaries.

Professor Andrew Macintosh, from ANU, said the results suggest the projects have been "substantially over-credited and are largely failing".

"The projects in the study received more than 27 million credits over the period of analysis and most of them claim regeneration started around 2010 to 2014," he said.



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