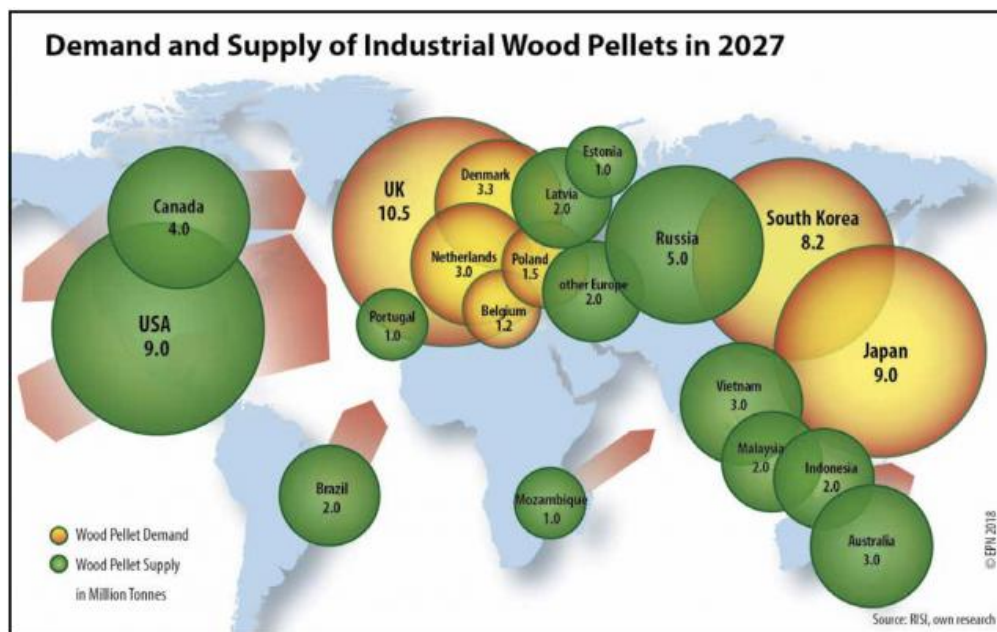


## Opinion: Native forest must not be made a 'renewable energy source'

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The horror of recent drought and bushfires has made the urgency for action on climate change ever more apparent to most Australians.

The intense logging that is happening right now in the small patches of state forest that have survived the recent bushfires is appalling. These trees are the only habitat left for the wildlife that has survived. It is estimated that over one billion animals perished.



1 The maps show the major exports and imports of industrial wood pellets. This does not include pellets produced and consumed in the same country, nor for domestic heating. Pellets can be made from agricultural by-products like straw or palm kernel shells, but forest biomass dominates in both supply and demand.

### Demand and supply of industrial wood pellets. Image supplied

Yet there are plans to significantly increase logging of our native forests and there are some who claim this is in order to combat climate change when it has been scientifically proven that logging increases the risk of more intense and devastating fires. <https://go.nature.com/2U0Idvm>)

Large amounts of flammable debris are left behind, an open canopy increases wind speeds and forest drying and a surge in sapling regrowth all combine to ratchet up the flammability of forests. Further research shows that it takes 200 years for forests to recover from post-fire logging, it takes 80 years for soils to recover and the wildlife simply perishes.

Right now, Australia's renewable energy agency (ARENA), is consulting with industry groups and the general community on whether to allow native forest timber to be classified as a *renewable energy source*. The logic being: trees contain carbon, which is released into the atmosphere when you burn them, but more trees can grow in their place sucking up carbon once again – thereby making the whole process “carbon neutral.”

Most of us will recognise the missing links in this logic: It omits the 70-100 years it takes for trees to regrow. It doesn't account for the impacts on climate from the removal of living carbon sinks. It doesn't account the carbon emissions caused by the increased frequency and intensity of wildfires.

Federal energy minister Angus Taylor is not perturbed by this implausible concept. He has asked ARENA for a 'Bioenergy Roadmap' which he hopes will include forest hardwood pellets to be burned as a 'renewable energy source'.

Taxpayer dollars will be used to subsidise logging operations to take more trees from the forest to be burned for electricity in repurposed coal furnaces and co-gen electricity plants. Subsidising biomass incentivises stripping a forest bare.

Small trees that would normally be left to grow are now more valuable to take for chipping and pelleting. Importantly the value of lost wildlife habitat and biodiversity is **not** part of the calculation that classifies biomass as renewable.

The figures quoted by NSW forestry are huge. They expect to log 1 million tons per annum in NE NSW alone (400,000 tons of this from our state forests). How much of this is incentivised by convenient calculations that equate forest derived biomass with genuine renewables like solar, wind, wave and thermal energies?

Hunter Energy (in the Hunter Valley) is one of several companies hoping to qualify for government "energy certificates". It intends to convert the former Redbank Coal Plant into a biomass operation that produces 150 MW of electricity.

CEO Richard Poole describes the process as 'zero emissions' using the convenient calculation above. In our region Cape Byron Power admits to using "wood waste" in their co-gen plants combined 30 MW operation. In response to a FOI request from NEFA last year on their actual fuel sources they declined to answer.

There is another part to this current push in Australia. Overseas the biomass industry has grown incredibly fast since the EU put woody biomass on the renewables subsidies list in 2009. A large percentage of Europe's emissions reduction targets are achieved by burning wood pellets for electricity – shipped from forests across the globe. Australia is at a crossroads.

We are on the verge of joining this supply chain and exporting forest derived biomass at a startling rate of increase <https://environmentalpaper.org/biomass-threat-map-2018/>

How many dollars will be diverted away from genuine renewable if we go down this slippery path? Or we can choose to follow Beyond Zero Emission's plan for Australia which received widespread support including from Malcom Turnbull. ( <https://bze.org.au/research/renewable-energy-plan/>)

Using commercially available technology we can achieve zero emissions whilst gaining significant economic benefits in a ten-year time frame.