

Revegetation as carbon sinks

In early February, a short series of workshops and information sessions were held in Western Australia by the Australian Greenhouse Office, an international lawyer specialising in carbon legislation and other experts in this emerging field.

There is enormous interest in carbon sequestration using revegetation with either biodiversity plantings or planting of commercial species. Some of the key points that came out of the sessions were that although the Australian Government is not ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, it is committed to achieving its 108% target during the Commitment Period 2008-2012. It will use the rules and definitions agreed under the Kyoto Protocol to monitor progress towards achieving its target. This means that as long as all afforestation and reforestation projects meet the Kyoto standards, they will contribute to Australia's national inventory, and potentially be able to participate in emissions offsets schemes.

The Australian Greenhouse Office (www.greenhouse.gov.au) has produced many valuable resources that are freely available and well worth a look at:

- Planning Forest Sink Projects – A guide to legal, taxation and contractual issues
- Planning Forest Sink Projects – A guide to carbon pooling and investment structures
- Growing trees as greenhouse sinks – an overview for landholders
- Climate Change in Rural and Regional Australia
- Living with Climate Change – an overview of potential climate change impacts on Australia
- Climate Change Science – questions and answers

The most amazing tool that is also freely available from the Australian Greenhouse Office is the National Carbon Accounting Toolbox and data viewer. This incredible set of two CDs allows users to zoom in on any area in Australia and, while linked to the internet, users can enter in a range of scenarios for any piece of land to calculate the carbon sequestration for a range of management regimes.

Each State and Territory in Australia has its own legislation in place and the Western Australian Government is said to have the best legislation of all of them. We have actually had a Carbon Rights Act since 2003, 'providing for a statutory form of carbon right that is created upon registration'. This enables the rights to the carbon to be separated from the land the trees are growing on and is entered onto the title of the property. This allows the carbon in the trees to be bought and sold separate from the land. The first signing over of this type of carbon rights was initiated by the Oil Mallee Company of Australia at a signing ceremony in Koorda in November 2005. The Western Australian government has produced two simple brochures: 'Carbon Rights in WA – a new interest in the land' and 'Tree plantations – securing your rights' which are also freely available.

Other information freely available on the internet from the CRC for Greenhouse Accounting: www.greenhouse.crc.org.au – 'Opportunities for the Western Australian land management sector arising from greenhouse gas abatement'

There are already many voluntary schemes such as the Men of the Trees' Carbon Neutral Program, but also Government schemes like 'Greenhouse Friendly' and 'Greenhouse Challenge Plus'.

So while many are frustrated at the Australian Government's reluctance to sign the Kyoto Protocol, there is actually a lot happening in this area and at a State and National level everyone is ensuring that emissions are being reduced and revegetation projects are actually Kyoto consistent* – just in case.

*** Kyoto-consistent**

In Australia, a forest sink must meet all of the following criteria:

- Comprise trees with a potential height of at least two meters and a crown cover of at least 20%;
- Cover an area greater than 0.2 hectares, and (for reasons of detectability) a minimum width of 10 metres;
- Have been established since 1 January 1990, on land that was clear of forest at 31 December 1989;
- Be established by direct human induced methods, such as planting, direct seeding, or the promotion of natural seed sources;

These criteria are consistent with those developed internationally under the Kyoto Protocol, which Australia will use in measuring progress towards its 108% emissions target.