

Submission to the Productivity Commission on Draft Report on Low Emissions Economy

4/6/18

Proposing to target land-use change and plant trees will have an unfair effect on sheep and beef farmers.

Emissions from methane and carbon dioxide are not similar. Methane decays in just over 10-12 years whereas carbon dioxide does not decay. So these sectors should be treated differently. However because the ETS focuses on yearly emissions, reduction measures have not focussed on the cumulative effect, which is affected more by the fossil fuels sector. It is the cumulative effect which determines global warming. Recent work by Dave Frame of VUW in conjunction with other international climate change researchers is showing that these two gases should be treated differently when accounting for climate change.

Mass afforestation will mean forestry interests end up buying hill country farms which are primarily sheep and beef farms. They will not buy erosion-prone properties because as from 1/5/18 the National Environmental Standards (NES) will require forestry to address issues concerning earthworks and setbacks from waterways. Instead they will prefer to buy easy hill country with roading in place or nearby. They will not buy dairy country land as that will be too expensive. So sheep and beef farmers will be targeted to meet the afforestation proposal whether it is ever harvested or not.

And yet sheep and beef farmers are not major contributors to global warming through methane emissions and while there are some other environmental issues which are being focussed on, over all sheep and beef farming in NZ is generally relatively green and sustainable at current numbers.

Instead of mass afforestation (most likely of pines or other single specie forests which are not ecologically sound), encouraging small multiple use and diverse plantings on individual properties to reduce erosion, provide canopy shelter for stock, alternative feeds in pasture-poor years, and habitats for bio-diverse insect species is a more ecologically sustainable way to proceed. These trees can be counted and monitored by satellite and take up carbon dioxide to reduce warming. They could also contribute to carbon credits for the farmer.

There will also be other unintended consequences. If large numbers of hill country farms go into forestry (as they will, if forestry interests are given incentives) then there will be major negative effects on the small rural communities that are supported by sheep and beef farms. Afforestation will be irreversible because of the costs of reconversion, employment will be reduced and businesses, schools, and communities like mine in Wairoa will die. This has been seen before after the wave of afforestation post Cyclone Bola in the 1990s. And the consequent current "wall of wood" is having other dire effects even now on communities all over NZ where rain events are causing major problems with the effects of slash.

It is unfair to target sheep and beef farmers, when the real contributors to global warming is the fossil fuel sector, just because it is easier to be seen to be doing something or because the government is reluctant to engage the general populace with the idea that our transport sector and other fossil fuel users need to make major changes.

It is important to remember the real object of ETS is to reduce global warming, and we need to do this by getting the science right first and adjusting the method to suit rather than following a path that will not make a difference for the ultimate goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit

Yours sincerely

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