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Media release

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Trees: Carbon cop-out or saviour?

Despite previous warnings that planting trees is not an effective way to offset greenhouse gas emissions, a new report finds that tree planting is as popular as ever as offset companies ignore the warnings and well-meaning consumers continue to be swept up in the tree planting craze.

In a paper entitled *Carbon Offsets: Saviour or cop-out?*, author Christian Downie argues that Australia needs a compulsory accreditation scheme for offsets projects. His paper finds that, in the absence of a rigorous scheme, governments and business are exploiting greenhouse fads as a smokescreen to distract people from the need for real cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

“By diverting people’s funds and attention to projects that are unlikely to reduce emissions significantly in the long term, some offset schemes could ultimately do more harm than good,” Mr Downie said.

“The promotion of tree planting to individuals and businesses is a prime example. Tree planting is the most popular type of carbon offset promoted in Australia but it is in fact the least effective for dealing with climate change.”

“The evidence indicates that offsets from renewable energy are the most effective, followed by those from energy efficiency projects, with forestry projects ranked last,” Mr Downie said.

“Tree planting, or forestry, can not secure real, measurable and permanent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions because sooner or later the forest will be felled, burned or destroyed.

“Concerned citizens should be congratulated for wanting to reduce their carbon footprint. But when they buy offsets from a forestry project with their airline ticket, for example, they are actually buying a promise that the immediate emissions from their flight will be gradually offset over the next 100 years. There can be very little if any guarantee that this will actually happen.”

Mr Downie said there are strong grounds for excluding forestry-based offsets from an emissions trading system in Australia, or at least placing restrictions on their use.

“The European Union’s scheme has excluded them entirely,” he said.

The paper can be read on the Institute’s website - www.tai.org.au