

# to hit reset



Journalist Charles Wooley sits in a clear-felled section of a Tasmanian rainforest.  
Picture: Frank MacGregor

## Forestry has vital role to play in tackling climate change

Carbon-negative status is due to forestry, not its absence, writes **Michelle Freeman**

TASMANIA'S status as the only Australian state to achieve negative carbon emissions in 2020 is an amazing achievement and one that should be celebrated. However, there is more to the story than what you might have read in recent news.

Tasmania's carbon-negative position has been promoted by some as being a result of reductions in native forest timber harvesting that have occurred since 2011. However, it's more complex than this simplistic narrative. Look a bit closer and you will find that harvesting and regrowing of forests has actually contributed to reaching this celebrated milestone.

This is because growing trees absorb carbon from the atmosphere. When the carbon being absorbed by young trees is more than the carbon emitted by harvesting, the forest becomes 'carbon-negative'.

In Tasmania, this effect has gone one step further, as the trees regrowing after harvesting are not just absorbing more carbon than is emitted from harvesting trees, but they are absorbing more carbon than the entire state emits. To put it simply, if past timber harvesting had never occurred and new trees regrown, Tasmania's carbon-negative position would not have been achieved.

However, in non-forest sectors of Tasmania, emissions have increased over the past 10 years. For now, these increased emissions are being offset by the growing trees in the forest sector. But, with a decline in timber harvesting, this offset will only provide a temporary respite – carbon absorption rates decline as forests age, meaning that

unless there are heavy emission reductions in other sectors, Tasmania will struggle to maintain its carbon-negative position into the future.

Forestry is the science and craft of creating, managing, conserving, using and caring for forests. It is an important tool for managing forest carbon and is one of the only sectors that can absorb more carbon than it emits. With young trees absorbing more carbon and old trees storing more carbon, a diverse multi-age managed forest provides a holistic solution to climate change.

Ethical and sustainable forestry continues to adapt to societal values, ecological needs and to climate change and, in this way, is pulling its weight on climate action. Sacrificing a sustainable forestry sector while emissions are still increasing in other sectors is not a genuine climate action, nor is it a long-term climate change solution.

Tackling climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our generation. Reducing or excluding Australia's capacity to conduct forest management will have major unintended consequences for carbon and our forests, including limiting our ability to combat climate change, mitigate bushfires and restore forest landscapes.

It will also lead to greater reliance on imports and alternatives with high carbon footprints, such as concrete and steel, as local, sustainable forest products become less available. Australia has a global responsibility to tackle climate change and forestry has a significant role to play in this response.

**Dr Michelle Freeman is vice president of Forestry Australia.**

take advantage of it.

In the wake of last week's national Cabinet meeting, Rockliff's eyes should be well and truly open to the dire state of federal and state climate and energy policies. The energy emergency in eastern Australia is a direct result of years of neglect and

complacency.

Now, with a new premier, a new federal government and a new national emissions target, the Rockliff government has a chance to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon future, including incentives to move transport and industry to electric power and

establishing wood harvesting regimes that protect the unrivalled ability of natural forest to store carbon.

The sense of urgency now infusing the national scene has to find its way into our state's new climate laws. If a wholly revised, bold new climate change Act allows room to

move to address the great challenges ahead, it will be Jeremy Rockliff's crowning achievement.

**Peter Boyer is a former Mercury reporter and public servant who specialises in the science and politics of climate.**

## age of detention is to be commended

toward rehabilitation. Job training and education programs, as well as housing assistance, employment, and other life skills bridged re-entry into society after prison. Mainstream prisoners are able to vote, have access to health care, and are encouraged to remain part of society. This is not rocket science, it is good sense and has proven time and again to lead to more productive outcomes.

According to retired NZ youth court Judge Mick

Brown, young people are the most law abiding citizens in our society. There are no white collar criminals, no tax dodgers, no need for an integrity commission. Only a small percentage of young people ever come to the attention of police. Of those that do, only a tiny percentage repeat offend, and any quality youth worker in any town or suburb knows who these kids are and they know their families. These are vulnerable children. Yet we are often sold

a shock-jock story of young people as some kind of criminal class. The consequence is bad practice, not best practice, as shrill law and order grandstanding drive policy, and in turn, magistrates have their hands tied when it comes to sentencing. The result is often our most vulnerable children being punished and damaged through additional incarceration trauma.

One example is the shocking statistic that of all

the children locked up in our country, 50 per cent are Aboriginal children from 3 per cent of the population. These children are not more criminal, it is systemic racism at work. That is the real crime.

Having worked in this field for 30 years, it is rewarding to see Tasmania leading the nation on this important issue of changing the age of detention. To build on this recent decision, Big hART is also keen to support the raising of the age of criminal

responsibility and to implement a renewed focus on therapeutic, primary prevention and diversionary responses to keep most young people out of the system.

To put it plainly, we must stop destroying young lives and families, and stop creating more fodder for the big business of incarceration. We look forward to continuing to work with the Tasmanian government in their commitment to these important reforms.

Next we must support the advocacy and lobbying by Indigenous leaders and volunteer groups to reduce the rate of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. This shift in policy from the Tasmanian government is an important first step.

**Scott Rankin is the chief executive and creative director of Big hART, Australia's leading social change organisation.**