



Mr Warwick Cathro

By email: warwickcathro@gmail.com

Dear Mr Cathro

Freedom of Information – Access Decision Letter – Request No 171101

I refer to your request of 7 November 2017 to the Department of the Environment and Energy (the **Department**), in which you have sought access under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the **FOI Act**). On 21 November 2017 the scope was refined to:

A document that contains a tabular breakdown of net LULUCF estimates reported in the March 2017 Quarterly Update into component activities (such as Deforestation and Forest Management), showing how these components contribute to the calculation of net LULUCF emissions totalling -3.0 Mt in 2016 and 4.6 in 2015.

Authority

I am authorised by the Secretary of the Department under s23 of the FOI Act to make a decision in relation to your request.

Background

The Department has identified one document as relevant and falling within the scope of your request.

The Department reports Australia's greenhouse gas inventory in May each year in a National Inventory Report (NIR). The latest NIR (Covering the period FY 1989-90 to 2014-15) can be found at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science-data/greenhouse-gas-measurement/publications/national-inventory-report-2015>.

The relevant areas (at national and state/territory levels) of forest cover change that are used in estimating net emissions - forest clearing and reclearing, as well as regrowth areas (combining regeneration and new forest plantings) - are reported in the latest NIR, along with areas of subforest (sparse) vegetation cover losses and gains (NIR 2015, Vol 2, Tables 6.L.1 to 6.L.3, pp228-229).

For more information on the State breakdown of trends in net emissions under Kyoto Protocol accounting up to the most recent annual inventory report for 2014-15, refer to Appendix 2 of the *State and Territory Greenhouse Gas Inventories, 2015* (<http://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science-data/greenhouse-gas-measurement/publications/state-and-territory-greenhouse-gas-inventories-2015>).

The National Greenhouse Accounts are of high quality. They are reviewed annually by a team of UN-accredited international experts, and were subject to an in-depth audit by the ANAO in 2016-17. Reports from both of these processes are publicly available online.

For most subcategories in the LULUCF sector, emissions are calculated and allocated into the appropriate UNFCCC and KP accounting subcategories in the Australian Greenhouse

Emissions Information System (AGEIS), using as inputs the modelled annual changes in carbon stock in forest and agricultural/grazing systems produced by the CSIRO-developed Full Carbon Accounting Model (FullCAM) (AGEIS can be accessed at <http://ageis.climatechange.gov.au/>).

The principal data input is spatial data on forest clearing and regrowth produced through the use of a time-series (since 1972) of Landsat satellite data and used to determine change in forest extent at a fine spatial disaggregation.

The Department shares data with State agencies including Queensland Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (SLATS) to improve our estimates of forest cover change. However, given differences in their technical implementation, these two data sets are not directly comparable. More information about this process is included in a special topic in the *September 2015 Quarterly Update* (<http://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/climate-science-data/greenhouse-gas-measurement/publications/quarterly-update-australias-national-greenhouse-gas-inventory-sep-2015>).

The forest cover change information is coupled together with spatially referenced databases of climate and land management practices which allows a comprehensive quantification of emissions.

The subcategories relating to forest harvesting and harvested wood products use non-spatial input data and combine with FullCAM and/or spreadsheet-based models.

Further information on the emissions estimates, including the methods and assumptions used in estimating emissions under each of the required accounting subcategories, is available in Volumes 2 and 3 of the National Inventory Report (NIR) published each year by the Department in accordance with the UNFCCC rules and guidelines.

Derivation of 2015-16 estimates for the Quarterly Updates

The LULUCF emissions estimates reported in the Quarterly Updates are calculated based on the latest annual NIR estimates which are published each year nominally in May. The latest NIR, published in May 2017, includes complete estimates from 1989-90 to 2014-15.

For Quarterly Updates that report estimates for periods after 2014-15, the NIR estimates are projected forward to the relevant Quarterly date, informed by indicators from external data sources such as the farmers' terms of trade (ABARES Agricultural commodity statistics) and using methodologies described in the LULUCF section of the latest Emissions Projections report, available at <http://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/publications/emissions-projections-2016>.

As explained on page 16 of the *Quarterly Update*, as processed satellite images showing areas of cover change were not available to support the calculation of emissions estimates for 2015-16 at the time the *March 2017 Quarterly Update* was developed, these preliminary estimates are subject to change and have a greater level of uncertainty than the other sectors in the *March 2017 Quarterly Update*.

In accordance with existing and past practice, the Department will take into account the latest satellite imagery, including the SLATS dataset released in October 2017, in preparing the final estimates of net forest clearing emissions for 2015-16. We note this SLATS dataset was published in October 2017 - after the March 2017 Quarterly Update, which was published in August 2017. The Department's new estimates will be reported in the next National Inventory Report, which is scheduled for release in early 2018, and will be used in subsequent Quarterly Updates.

Explanatory Notes

LULUCF estimates involve a combination of complex modelling and associated databases. As such, there is no simple document showing the calculation of net emissions from input data.

The accompanying spreadsheet disaggregates the net anthropogenic emissions from the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector of Australia's National Greenhouse Accounts.

LULUCF accounts are reported under the UNFCCC framework, and separately under the UNFCCC's Kyoto Protocol. The tables show the annual net emission levels and the trends over the period FY1989-90 to 2015-16 for each of the LULUCF components under the two reporting frameworks.

The table entitled UNFCCC LULUCF shows how net emissions from each of the land-type subcategories reported under the UNFCCC accounting rules contribute to the sectoral total. The chart entitled UNFCCC LULUCF illustrates the trends in each subcategory and replicates Figure 19 in the March 2017 Quarterly Update of Australia's Greenhouse Gas Inventory.

The table entitled KP LULUCF shows how net emissions from each of the activity-based subcategories reported under the Kyoto Protocol accounting rules contribute to the sectoral total. The data in this table underpins Figure 18 in the March 2017 Quarterly Update.

We would be happy to discuss our methods and data in more detail as required. In this case, please contact John Jende of the Land Inventory Team (John.jende@environment.gov.au; 02 6159 7430).

Decision

After considering your request, I have decided to grant you access to the document in full. This document is attached at **ATTACHMENT B**.

Material considered in making my decision

In making my decision in relation to each document I have considered:

- the document;
- the FOI Act; and
- the *Guidelines issued by the Australian Information Commissioner under s93A of the Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the **FOI Guidelines**).

Review rights

Under the FOI Act you may seek a review of my decision through:

- an internal review that is conducted by the Department – see Part VI of the FOI Act; or
- a review by the Information Commissioner – see Part VII of the FOI Act.

Further information regarding your review rights is available at **Attachment A**.

Disclosure log

Pursuant to section 11C of the FOI Act, the Department will publish on their website details of how the document at **ATTACHMENT B** may be obtained within 10 days of providing you with this decision.

Further assistance

The FOI Contact Officer in the Department can be contacted by telephone on 02 6274 2098 or by email at foi@environment.gov.au for any assistance with your request.

Yours sincerely



Rob Sturgiss
Assistant Secretary
National Inventory System and International Reporting Branch



November 2017

YOUR REVIEW RIGHTS

Internal review

If you wish to seek an internal review, you must apply to the Department within 30 days after the day you are notified of this decision.

An application for internal review of the decision made must be made in writing. No particular form is required but it is helpful if you set out in the application the grounds on which you consider that the decision should be reviewed. Your application for an internal review should be sent to one of the following addresses:

Post: FOI Contact Officer
General Counsel Branch
Department of the Environment and Energy
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601

Email: foi@environment.gov.au

Review by the Information Commissioner

You may request a review of this decision by the Information Commissioner.

If you request an internal review and are unhappy with the result you may also apply for an Information Commissioner review.

If you wish to request a review by the Information Commissioner you must apply to the Information Commissioner within 30 days after the day on which notice of this decision (or an internal review decision) was given to you.

Further details on how to request an Information Commissioner review can be obtained from the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner:

Online: <https://www.oaic.gov.au/freedom-of-information/foi-review-process>

Post: GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001

Fax: 02 9284 9666

Phone: 1300 363 992

Email: enquiries@oaic.gov.au

