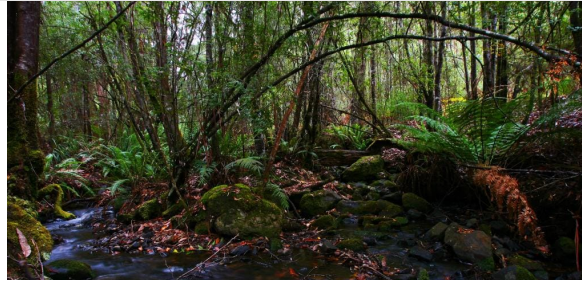


MERCURY



📍 Tasmania's ancient forests are perfect carbon dioxide warehouses.

OPINION

Talking Point: Rent the state's forests, don't clear-fell them

REESE HALTER, Mercury

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CALIFORNIA, the Netherlands and other countries are now searching to buy carbon dioxide offset – is Tasmania selling? That's a question I asked a packed audience last Saturday night at the Wild Island Gallery in Hobart on my Save Nature Now world tour.

A couple of weeks ago, 900 activists represented by The Urgenda Foundation successfully argued that the Dutch government has a legal obligation to protect its people against looming dangers of rising sea levels because much of the low-lying country is in fact below sea level and therefore highly vulnerable to rising sea levels caused by the climate crisis.

The court agreed that unless rapid action was taken the next 40 years would experience extreme weather, shrinking ice caps and shortages of both food and fresh water. As such, the government was ordered to cut the Netherlands' greenhouse gas emissions by 25 per cent by 2020.

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For every one tonne of ancient wood, one-and-a-half tonnes of carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere and one tonne of oxygen is released into the atmosphere.

My colleagues in America found that ancient forests remove significantly more carbon dioxide than second growth 150-year-old forests. That's why corporations like Marriott are renting ancient Amazon forests to offset their global carbon footprint.

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My home state of California is the eighth mightiest economy on the globe. We are looking to purchase more carbon offset because AB-32, a law passed by former governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, requires all businesses to pulse down 25 per cent below the 1990 carbon dioxide levels. The Netherlands have recently entered into the carbon reduction arena and they, too, need offset.

Since Tasmania's ancient forests are mostly owned by the Crown and managed by Forestry Tasmania, which is subsidised by as much as \$30 million per annum – it makes prudent fiscal sense for Premier Will Hodgman to quickly approach Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands and broker a deal to provide them with their carbon dioxide offset.

Renting Tasmania's ancient forests is a sound economic model because it provides a long-term revenue stream for the government, it ends imprudent subsidies and destruction of invaluable forests, and it protects Tasmanians and all earthlings from rising levels of heat-trapping carbon dioxide due to burning in excess of 96 million tonnes of fossil fuels daily on our planet.

All foresters are taught that forestry is the art and science of regrowing trees on denuded lands; it's time they truly practice this because each year more than a million people visit Tasmania to experience its renowned pristine southern hemisphere forests and they spend millions of dollars in local economies.

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Clear-felling forests provides a one-off stumpage payment to the Crown. Renting ancient forests, on the other hand, provides a constant revenue stream and protects the magnificent carbon dioxide warehouses for Tasmanian children.

It's time to consider the options now because within a decade the ancient forests will be gone forever, and that's an avoidable and shameful legacy for future generations.

Dr Reese Halter is an American author and environmental activist with a PhD in eco-stress physiology from the School of Forestry, Melbourne University.