

10. 'Evergreen' and REDD+ in the Forests of Oceania

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Forests, Conversions and Climate Change

Any global agreement on climate change will impact on how we manage our forestry operations. If we are to sustain our industry into the future, we must stay alert and aware of these developments. Most importantly, we must respond by making our case to Governments and business partners around the world. If we don't, the future of our industry will be in peril. (Tiong Hiew King 2008)

Throughout most of industrialised history, forests have been worth more felled than standing. Countries in the developed world, including Australia, New Zealand, United States, Canada and Europe have clear-felled around half of the world's primary forests to plant agricultural crops, create urban centres, extract wood for construction or burn timber as fuel. In response to the international demand for timber and timber products, most deforestation in the twentieth century has occurred in developing countries, which collectively harbour around half of the world's remaining natural forest. In the twenty-first century, predictions of global warming have led to a new way of seeing forests as repositories of carbon. In the climate change 'crisis', the maintenance of existing forests as well as increasing forest coverage is touted to make an important contribution to the mitigation of global warming, but this potential is yet to be realised (Nabuurs et al. 2007; Capoor and Ambrosi 2008). From a governance perspective, the international climate regime is playing a dominant

role in influencing environmental and developmental policy internationally (Maguire 2010: 5) and is opening up spaces for critical change in 'sustainable forest management' (SFM).

To illuminate how this focus has generated new possibilities for change in Oceania's forestry industry, I first situate the idea of climate change within the immense institutional, managerial and surveillance apparatus focused on the regulation of atmospheric emissions. I then show how the 'triple-interface' (Boykoff 2010: 397) of science, policy and media is being utilised by governments, industry and corporate interests to leverage support for developmental objectives. Finally, I outline Rimbunan Hijau's responses to climate capitalism and highlight local strategies of resistance that open the company to external scrutiny.

The Idea of Climate Change

The ecological problem of industrialisation is not new, and its negative effects on nature have been debated for the past 150 years. Icons of the ecological dilemmas facing the world have ranged from deforestation in European countries in the nineteenth century, wilderness conservation at the beginning of the twentieth century and resource depletion in the 1970s (Hajer 1996: 247). Anxieties about artificially induced climate change and species extinction date back to the mid-1700s, thus the current awareness of a global environmental threat is largely a reiteration of a set of ideas that had reached full maturity over a century ago (Grove 1990: 14). What is new in the twenty-first century is the positioning of global warming as 'the greatest known challenge facing the world' (Hunt 2009: 1). As repositories of carbon, forests are seen as timely assets (Ferry and Limbert 2008) that can save the world from 'ecological apocalypse' (Ecological Internet 2011).

Climate change is an idea that has served many purposes and continues to do so (Hulme 2009). The idea of scientific mastery over climate for the global good first appeared in the closing paragraph of Ellsworth Huntington's 1915 book *Civilisation and Climate*. In reflecting the scientific ideals of the Enlightenment, Huntington wrote, 'If we can conquer climate, the whole world will become stronger and nobler' (Hulme 2009: 21). Two decades earlier, the first official explanation of how carbon dioxide can act as a greenhouse gas was provided in 1896 by the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius (Houghton 2004: 17). It wasn't until the mid-twentieth century that the first monitoring of increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere began, followed by a series of studies carried

out by the United States Department of Energy in the 1970s raising concerns about possible global warming (Lohmann 2006: 35). This marked the beginning of the discursive construction of global climate change.

In 1988, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 45/53 on the 'Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind' (Lutken and Michaelowa 2008: 1), which led to the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — the largest international scientific assessment of climate change. Although the IPCC signalled that the 'science is settled' on global warming (IPCC 2007), its critics regard the science advice of the IPCC as 'politically cast' and thereby fundamentally flawed (Carter 2010: 26). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) formalised the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which expired in 2012. The protocol's core aim was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere in order to 'prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system' (UNFCCC 2008: 3). As a regulatory mechanism, the Kyoto Protocol not only created the justification for the commodification of the atmosphere, but also inspired new forms of activism and sites of scientific, economic, social and political conflict.

'Air Money', REDD and REDD+

The Melanesian term 'air money' or 'sky money' has come to symbolise the mystique of capturing carbon dioxide (Wood 2011). Mystique is also attributed to the ways in which anthropogenic contributions to climate change have been calculated (Kellow 2007: 47), with computer models predicting future climate scenarios according to the assumptions programmed into them (Carter 2010: 21). These predictions have generated detailed economic forecasting and policy creation around the role of forests in reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD).

REDD first emerged in the UNFCCC negotiations over accounting rules for the impact on carbon sinks of changes in land use, particularly afforestation, reforestation, deforestation and forest management (Articles 3.3 and 3.4 of the Kyoto Protocol). In the Kyoto Protocol, a decision was made to exclude carbon emissions from tropical deforestation. Countries met their Kyoto targets primarily through national measures, but were also offered an additional means of meeting targets by way of three market-based 'emissions trading' schemes known as the carbon market, clean development mechanism (CDM) and joint implementation.

The mechanism known as joint implementation enabled Annex B parties¹ with an emission-reduction or limitation commitment to earn emission-reduction units from an emission-reduction or emission-removal project in another Annex B party, each unit equivalent to one tonne of carbon dioxide (UNFCCC 2010).² Credits from avoided deforestation were excluded due to the challenges and uncertainties of quantifying forest-sector emissions ('leakage'), which could potentially weaken the overall strength of the climate regime. Moreover, developing countries were concerned that a plan to reduce deforestation would threaten their sovereignty over land-use decisions and right to develop. An eligibility criterion was 'additionality', which required that reductions in emissions must be additional to any that would occur in the absence of the certified project activity (Kyoto Protocol, Article 12[5]).

The CDM allows industrialised countries to earn carbon credits from reforestation and afforestation projects in developing countries. The idea encapsulated in the CDM is that carbon markets will provide an efficient system for reducing global emissions and drive investment towards the cheapest reductions. By 2008, this mechanism had not greatly favoured forestry projects. Only one afforestation project had been approved out of the 1016 CDM projects, but approximately 100 more were in preparation (UNFCCC 2008). By 2010 there were 5,600 projects in the CDM pipeline, of which 2801 were registered and 56 others awaiting registration (UNFCCC 2011). Of these, only 14 were afforestation and reforestation projects, and another 2 were seeking registration. Only one CDM project combined carbon emissions credits with reforestation (*ibid.*).³ By 2013 there were 6,838 CDM projects registered, with only 7 described as afforestation/reforestation projects.⁴ By 2015 just 2 of the 7,644 registered projects were listed as afforestation/reforestation projects.⁵ 'Free-trade' advocates believe that the responsibility for the effective failure of CDM in facilitating afforestation and reforestation projects lies primarily with the rules for 'additionality', which diminish financial incentives for undertaking CDM projects (World Growth 2010).

1 Annex B countries include the main European Union member states, Australia, Japan, Russia and the United States. Thirty-nine industrialised countries are listed in Annex B of the Kyoto Protocol.

2 As of 2010, there were 197 active joint implementation projects (UNFCCC 2010).

3 Bolivia (Project 2510).

4 India (Project 2345), China (Project 2700), Chile (Project 3338), Uruguay (Project 3845), Brazil (Project 3887), Congo (Project 4176), Uganda (Project 4653).

5 Brazil (Project 3887) and China (Project 9563); cdm.unfccc.int/index.html (viewed June 2015).

Forests only became pivotal to reducing global emissions in December 2005 when, at the United Nations Conference of the Parties in Montreal, the Coalition for Rainforest Nations,⁶ led by Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica, proposed the inclusion of carbon finance for reducing national rates of deforestation. The initial proposal was limited to reducing carbon emissions from deforestation (RED) but was expanded at Bali, in December 2006, to include forest degradation (REDD) (Karousakis and Corfee-Morlot 2007; IUCN 2008; Miles and Kapos 2008). Representing the members of the Coalition for Rainforest Nations, Kevin Conrad, who was lauded as a 'hero of the environment' (Stiglitz 2008) and a 'champion of the earth',⁷ tabled the idea of paying for the conservation of forests. Conrad issued a bold challenge to the United States: 'If, for some reason, you're not willing to lead, leave it to the rest of us, and please get out of the way' (Stiglitz 2008). A year earlier in January 2005, Conrad persuaded Michael Somare, then prime minister of Papua New Guinea (PNG), to call for the establishment of a coalition for rainforest nations, which he did in a speech to the World Leaders Forum at Columbia University (Filer 2011b).

In principle, REDD enables developing countries to receive financial payments from developed countries for reducing national deforestation rates below a baseline level prior to 1992. With little objection from the international community, REDD became the financial mechanism adopted at Bali to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries. The inclusion of REDD in a post-Kyoto framework was widely accepted by the international political community because it provided a way for developed countries to offset carbon emissions and enabled developing countries with large forestry resources, such as PNG, to receive payments for conservation.

Following the widespread acceptance of the principles of REDD as a carbon mitigation measure at Bali, the response of developing countries, including Africa and Malaysia, shifted towards a defensive attitude for their forestry industries. Africa demanded that REDD encompass clear recognition of the role of commercial forestry in development and conservation (World Growth 2009), while Malaysia's submission on REDD argued for a critical distinction to be made between 'deforestation' and SFM:

Malaysia ... feels that the definition of deforestation needs to be broad enough to cover the various levels and patterns of forest degradation. This is important

6 The Coalition for Rainforest Nations includes Bangladesh, Belize, Bolivia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Colombia, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Gabon, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Republic of the Congo, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Suriname, Thailand, Uganda, Uruguay, Vanuatu and Vietnam (Wainwright et al. 2008).

7 www.unep.org/champions/laureates/2009/conrad.asp#sthash.YR9Jt1WC.dpbs (viewed June 2015).

as any level of degradation exists on the continuum between completely sound, protected forests and complete deforestation. As such, a pattern of continued forest degradation will contribute significantly to a net increase in emissions, eventually culminating in complete deforestation and should therefore be differentiated from sustainable forest management. (MNRE 2007)

This emphasis on graduated deforestation seems to imply that anything less than complete deforestation may constitute SFM; however, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) principles for sustainable tropical forest management include the wider political, social and economic criteria without which sustainability is probably unattainable. Lobbying for SFM as a mode of carbon management was pursued by global neoliberal institutions such as the ITTO, which issued a statement at Bali outlining its commitment to advancing as quickly as possible the full implementation of SFM in the tropics ‘including reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, carbon sequestration through restoration, thus contributing to addressing the issue of climate change’.⁸ As a result of industry lobbying and political pressure from developing countries such as Malaysia, paragraph 1(b)(iii) of the Bali Action Plan included the provision for the ‘sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks’ (UNFCCC 2007) — this is the moment when REDD+ emerged. The critical text for the ‘plus’ in the Bali Action Plan, which attempted to bridge the long-standing tensions between conservation and development goals, appears after the semicolon:

Policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (UNFCCC 2007).

The inclusion of forest conservation in an international voluntary agreement to address the impacts of global warming was driven by estimates from British economist Lord Stern, who attributed more than 18 per cent of global carbon emissions to deforestation (Stern 2006: xxv). According to free-trade lobbyist Alan Oxley of World Growth, independent research by United States-based consultants Winrock International (commissioned by the World Bank) estimated that deforestation accounts for only 6–8 per cent of global emissions (World Growth 2009). Broadening the definition of ‘forests’ to include plantation forests, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations’ *State of the World’s Forests 2011* (FAO 2011: 3) claimed that globally, the overall rate of deforestation is slowing,⁹ partly due to a transition from deforestation to

⁸ Statement by Emmanuel Ze Meka, Executive Director of the ITTO at the High-Level Segment of the Thirteenth Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC – Cop 13/CMP 3, Bali, Indonesia, 3–14 December.

⁹ The FAO found that global deforestation and loss of forests from natural causes (‘while still alarmingly high’) has ‘decreased from an estimated 16 million hectares per year in the 1990s to around 13 million hectares per year in the last decade’ (FAO 2011: 3).

afforestation in the Asia–Pacific region, where plantation forest area increased by 2.85 per cent annually over the past decade (*ibid.*: 9).¹⁰ According to the FAO this was accompanied by an increase of around 1.92 per cent (from 2000 to 2010) in the global area of forest designated primarily for the conservation of biological diversity (*ibid.*: 10).¹¹

Climate Capitalism and Industry Lobbying: From Bali to Copenhagen and Beyond

As the Conference of Parties travelled from Bali (2007) to Copenhagen (2009), the UNFCCC attempted to garner consensus for the replacement to the Kyoto Protocol. Negotiators drafted and redrafted the policy text for REDD, determined to produce a coherent vision for the international community and generate a set of norms and practices that would govern national carbon emissions. However, these forums also afforded opportunity for free-trade advocates and industry lobby groups to present arguments in support of the role of industrial forestry and plantation development to be included in global warming solutions. Powerful industry organisations leveraged on the FAO definition of 'forests', arguing that industrial plantations should qualify as forest conservation projects as long as they do not contribute to a net increase in national carbon emissions. Consensus-building for industrial plantations was a strategy of the global timber industry. Among the prominent and influential advocates for the industrial forestry sector was Alan Oxley, managing director of international trade consultants ITS Global, an Australian public relations company. ITS Global has been commissioned by Rimbunan Hijau since 2006 to counter the ongoing campaign by Greenpeace (2004, 2006) and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) against industrial logging in PNG. Oxley is a former diplomat who held a position on Australia's Foreign Affairs Council as Australia's envoy to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the predecessor to the World Trade Organization in the late 1980s.¹² Oxley describes himself as 'one of the world's leading experts on globalization and international trade' and is the founding chairman of 'World Growth', a free-market NGO based

¹⁰ 'This was primarily due to large-scale afforestation efforts in China, where the forest area increased by 2 million hectares per year in the 1990s and by an average of 3 million hectares per year since 2000. Bhutan, India, the Philippines and Viet Nam also registered forest area increases in the last decade' (FAO 2011: 9).

¹¹ The FAO claims that the area of forest designated primarily for conservation of biological diversity in Asia and the Pacific increased by 1.8 per cent from 2000 to 2010 (FAO 2011: 10, Table 9).

¹² Alan Oxley is currently chairman of the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Study Centre at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University, Australia.

in Washington DC, producing targeted industry research, particularly in areas such as Malaysia and PNG, with a direct bearing on international trade issues linked to oil palm and timber production.

World Growth uses high-impact international business media to disseminate pro-industry 'solutions' to leaders of developed and developing countries, and draws upon moral arguments about progress and growth to justify its lobbying:

World Growth believes that helping the developing world realize its full potential is one of the great moral aims for those of us fortunate to live in the wealthy developed world (www.worldgrowth.org).

Oxley's use of multimedia to mobilise contested scientific claims in support of plantation forestry and the need for adaptation through further deforestation ('alternative land use') relies largely on the language of uncertainty and risk management. During the international climate negotiations, his outspoken views on pro-development solutions to global warming reached international business audiences and government leaders via Bloomberg, CNN, CNBC, *The Wall Street Journal*, *International Herald Tribune*, SBS World News Australia, *Jakarta Post*, *Business Times* and *The New York Times*, as well as high-impact trade journals. The intense international media campaign mounted by World Growth attempted to undermine the fundamental principles of REDD as a conservation strategy and questioned the ethics and motives of some of the largest environmental lobby groups including Greenpeace International and WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature). Although World Growth's campaign against the green movement relentlessly targeted the agendas of international environmental organisations,¹³ Oxley's critique of institutions that limited growth in developing countries also extended to the World Bank (World Growth 2011b) and the United Nations:

We are frequently opposed by other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who are ideologically unreceptive to free enterprise and skeptical of the merits of economic growth. Along with NGOs we face challenges at major multilateral institutions such as the United Nations which too often promote one-size-fits-all policy responses to problems. (Chairman's Message, worldgrowth.org)

In October 2010, Oxley's pro-development stance drew strong criticism from eminent members of the scientific community. In 'An Open Letter about Scientific Credibility and the Conservation of Tropical Forests', Laurance et al. (2010) alleged that ITS Global and World Growth 'have at times treaded a thin line between reality and a significant distortion of facts' (ibid.: 1). Particular criticism was directed at Oxley's lobbying support for Rimbunan Hijau, which was described as a 'predatory corporation' (ibid.). Oxley attacked the article's credibility, claiming it 'simply re-counts — almost source for source

13 See worldgrowth.org/category/research/ (viewed June 2015).

— Greenpeace's failed campaign to shut down the PNG forest industry from last decade' (ITS Global 2011a). Oxley staunchly defended the PNG forestry industry and his client, Rimbunan Hijau:

Laurence et al. throw a litany of accusations against PNG's forest industry — specifically one company, Rimbunan Hijau — and align it with the country's myriad social and environmental problems: corruption, violence, poor development indicators, deforestation and weak governance. The implication is that without the forest industry in Papua New Guinea, the country would somehow magically be free of corruption, deforestation and other ills. Anyone who has set foot in Papua New Guinea would be acutely aware of the absurdity of this. (ITS Global 2011a)

Around this time, PNG was emerging from a 'carbon cowboy' fiasco (see Wood, Chapter 9, this volume), which had caused a media sensation two years earlier and brought the PNG government into disrepute at the much anticipated Copenhagen Climate Talks. Leading up to the UNFCCC conference at Copenhagen (COP15), touted as a crucial event in the negotiating process, dichotomising discourses of 'conservation' and 'sustainable development' had generated serious conflicts between countries of the North and the South. By the time world leaders met in Denmark in 2009, scientific uncertainty and conflicting value claims had created irreconcilable differences in the positions adopted by developed and developing countries. The bitterness and scepticism that bedevilled the talks became exasperated by a leaked draft agreement from the European Union, which called for a total halt to deforestation by 2030. This evoked further anger from the tropical countries at the North's failure to commit to dramatic emissions reductions. The subsequent result in the Copenhagen Accord was the removal of all targets for deforestation and a much weakened language on safeguards. An earlier draft contained a target for reducing deforestation by at least 50 per cent by 2020, but as a result of the leaked European Union proposal, deforestation targets were removed from the negotiating text (Lang 2009). The accord firmly endorsed REDD+ with an emphasis on SFM consistent with long-term sustainable land management (Verchot and Petkova 2009). Governments of the world's biggest palm oil producers, including Malaysia, swiftly rejected proposals put forward by global environmental groups to exclude the expansion of oil palm plantations in REDD+ projects.

A year later, in December 2010 at the climate change negotiations at Cancún in Mexico, the UNFCCC further endorsed the option for developing countries to conserve their forests and receive payments for avoided deforestation and the enhancement of carbon stocks (REDD+). Emission credits could also be granted for the use of 'green technology' developed through the CDM. In addition to having no binding commitments to curb deforestation, the inclusion of

plantation forests as an internationally endorsed modality of carbon capture and storage was one of the most controversial inclusions in the Cancún Agreement. In COP 16, Cancún 2010, the final decision on REDD+:

Encourages developing country Parties to contribute to mitigation actions in the forest sector by undertaking the following activities, as deemed appropriate by each Party and in accordance with their respective capabilities and national circumstances:

- (a) Reducing emissions from deforestation;
- (b) Reducing emissions from forest degradation;
- (c) Conservation of forest carbon stocks;
- (d) Sustainable management of forest;
- (e) Enhancement of forest carbon stocks.¹⁴

The agreement emphasised the need to ensure at national and community levels that REDD+ ‘complements restoration, poverty alleviation and adaptation’ and ‘promotes and operationalizes safeguards and accountability’ (IISD 2011). These priorities couple the ideals of SFM with the free-market principles of ecological modernisation.

REDD and Ecological Modernisation

In 2011, as developing countries began committing voluntary targets to reduce greenhouse gases and participate in international REDD programs to cease deforestation and reshape their economies as ‘low carbon’ economies, Alan Oxley released a study by World Growth which argued that conservation strategies such as REDD will impoverish the poor and put biodiversity at risk (World Growth 2011a).

The sentiments expressed by Oxley are closely echoed in Rimbunan Hijau’s (PNG) pro-development discourse, which draws upon principles of ecological modernisation to champion economic growth and global trade over conservation strategies:

The economic consequences of global warming mitigation strategies currently proposed will probably be worse than the effects of global warming itself. Therefore, adaptation and resiliency strategies should be considered as a more cost-effective alternative. In addition, ‘no regrets’ strategies that will provide benefits from greater economic growth whether global warming proves to be a problem or not, should be adopted at once. (RH PNG 2010: 4)

¹⁴ Report of the Conference of the Parties on its sixteenth session, held in Cancún from 29 November to 10 December 2010, FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.1. (unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf#page=2).

Ecological modernisation theorists argue that forest destruction and biodiversity loss can be reversed by developing flexible liberal institutions which foster sustainable capitalism through the restructuring of the state towards participatory policy making. Rather than a withering of the role of the state in environmental governance, the introduction of favourable conditions for collaboration with civil society, environmental groups and the public sphere is expected to transform responsibilities, incentives and roles to the market, reorienting the state to serve as a coordinating function with other sectors in support of forests (Mol 1995: 46–7). Ecological modernisation, which has dominated or been deployed by industry advocates in political debates concerning global ecological objectives (Hajer 1996: 249), strives to achieve a balance between environmental sustainability and economic development. Ecological modernisation is increasingly articulated in the principles of SFM. For example, in the past decade the discourse of SFM has gradually shifted from 'forest management by exclusion' to 'management by inclusion of stakeholder groups', and 'sustained yield timber management' has become 'sustainable forest ecosystem management' (Kant and Lee 2004). Such ecosystem-based terminology (some would call rhetoric) is underpinned by concepts such as 'system', 'relationships', 'interconnectivity', 'community', 'uncertainty', 'adaption', 'precaution' and 'inclusivity', which now permeate natural resource management discourses (Gale and Haward 2011: 46). In the international regulation of SFM, Maguire (2010: 288) argues that the design of REDD+ 'is the first global instrument to embrace the ideas behind environmental justice in the forest context'.

According to Kant and Lee (2004: 215), there are two dominant features of SFM under a REDD framework which offer potential for moving towards a more sustainable future in Oceania's forests and local communities. First, REDD can include the recognition of multiple forest values, beyond the customary timber values, including non-timber products, value of eco-services and indigenous values (ibid.). Second, SFM under REDD+ may accommodate the preferences of multiple stakeholder groups, such as local communities and environmental groups in forest management decision making (ibid.). The problem of ecological modernisation-influenced SFM development under the framework of REDD+ is that it is designed to be implemented in a classical top-down approach, starting at government level and ending with the integration of rural communities living in or around the forests. Thus, stakeholder participation is the last consideration in project implementation, and although safeguards are being negotiated to ensure that forest actors have a reasonable share in the economic benefits, the capacity to enforce compliance depends on the SFM system established at the national level. This means that SFM implementation largely relies on voluntary corporate commitments to 'best practice' standards in natural resource management. In climate capitalism, the rhetoric of SFM has acquired authority and served

particular social interests, and is increasingly becoming institutionalised within organisational structures and practices that attempt to legitimise the expansion of corporate capitalism.

Rimbunan Hijau: REDDish Transformations in Green Capitalism

In its home state of Sarawak, Malaysia, Rimbunan Sawit Berhad (a publicly listed company majority owned by the Rimbunan Hijau Group) is one of the leading palm oil producers and processors of crude palm oil and oil palm seeds, with approximately 93,500 hectares of land in Miri, Kuching and Sibu (Sarawak).¹⁵ 'Sustaining Wellness' is the slogan on its annual reports for 2013 and 2014 (RSB 2013, 2014). Adopting a policy of 'Developing Smart Partnerships' (RSB 2009: 9), Tiong Hiew King, (then) executive chairman, focused on equity acquisitions in integrated oil palm plantations in Sarawak. Rimbunan Sawit's 'group vision' is to be one of the leading integrated oil palm companies in the Asia-Pacific. Much of the demand for palm oil is being generated by the global demand for alternative energy sources, such as biofuel. In the 2008/09 financial year the group increased its land area by 53.86 per cent (RSB 2009). This was followed in the 2009/10 financial year with equity acquisition of 11 plantation companies, and a plantation estate with commercial rights.

In tandem with its 'group mission' to enhance stakeholder value, Rimbunan Sawit deploys the language of climate-friendly development to assert its commitment to nature:

One of our commitments to the nature is the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project in RH Plantation Palm Oil Mill. The project will recover methane caused by the decay of biogenic matter in the effluent stream. Methane recovered will be used to generate electricity for the mill and vicinity plantations. The project will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in an economically sustainable manner and is expected to reduce carbon dioxide equivalent by 20,002 tons per year. Zero burning during land development is practised to ensure minimal carbon emission. Besides, biological control is practised for pest management to reduce the dependency on pesticides. Empty fruit bunch is used as much [mulch] in plantations in order to recycle the nutrients present. This helps to reduce the dependency on chemical fertilizers. (RSB 2009: 10–1)

15 In 2013, the production area was 36,867 hectares, an increase of 1,739 hectares from 2012. The group's oil palm-planted area was 54,659 hectares (RSB 2013). In 2014, the group's oil palm-planted area increased to 57,182 hectares (RSB 2014).

Another of Tiong Hiew King's majority-owned public companies in Malaysia, Subur Tiasa Holdings, says it has championed 'eco-friendly' practices and adopted SFM because of its 'love of forests and wood':

We love forests. We love wood.

Our heart for habitat compels us to commit not just to practice Sustainable Forest Management but to spearhead a comprehensive strategy that strives to ensure the sustainability of the environment. (suburtiasa.com.my/csr/the-wood-spa/)

Claims to SFM and commitment to tree planting (for sustainable supply) are positioned in Subur Tiasa's investment discourse as reflecting the ethical orientation of its director Tiong Ing, who is described as a 'zealous lover of the habitat':

Simply put, we plant trees. We plant significantly more trees than we log. Thirty times to be precise (as of 2010). It is unrealistic to ignore the continual demand for wood as a material for very practical needs. Extensive research is also being carried out to ensure proper conservation of our forests.

Selected indigenous species are being planted and rapid-growing exotic species are planted in areas designated for Industrial Tree Planting. Island Corridor Planting is also practised to reduce the burden bore by the environment and to preserve biodiversity which is at Subur Tiasa's heart.

To accelerate and ensure our sustainable growth in today's competitive business environment, we have partnered with our major shareholder, Rimbunan Hijau Group, to invest in our wood treatment strategy that is fronted by none other than our Managing Director, Dato' Tiong Ing, a zealous lover of the habitat. (suburtiasa.com.my/csr/the-wood-spa/)

In New Zealand, Rimbunan Hijau's sister company Ernslaw One¹⁶ (the fourth-largest forestry plantation owner in New Zealand) promotes its investments as being carbon neutral:

Ernslaw One has over 25,000 ha of post-1989 Kyoto compliant forests, making it one of the largest owners of post-1989 forests in New Zealand ... The forests are spread throughout New Zealand, and comprise two species, Radiata pine and Douglas fir ... Radiata pine is clearfelled anytime from age 25 onwards, whereas Douglas fir is from 45 years. This means that when Ernslaw One starts harvesting the Radiata pine in approx 2022, the Douglas fir will still be growing and will cover any carbon liability that may occur. Similarly, when the Douglas fir is being harvested, the Radiata pine will be growing. Ernslaw One can thus manage their forests for timber production, as well as ensuring that no liability arises for any carbon that is sold from the forest. (ernslaw.co.nz/carbon-sequestration/)

16 Ernslaw One's major shareholder is the Tiong family, headed by Tiong Hiew King.

Drawing on plantation experience in New Zealand as well as in Malaysia, Rimbunan Hijau is moving towards investing in plantations in PNG. The company has been testing plantation species for suitability in Western Province (RH PNG 2009). In the proposal subtitled 'An Initiative by Rimbunan Hijau (PNG) Group Demonstrating Its Continued Commitment to Sustainable Forest Management in Papua New Guinea through Reforestation' (RH PNG n.d.), the matrix of benefits specified carbon sequestration as one of the ecological benefits (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Rimbunan Hijau's matrix of benefits from plantation forestry.

Social	Ecological	Economic
Employment	Carbon sequestration	Timber production
Recreation	Wildlife	Carbon trade
Taungya system	Aesthetic	Diversification of local economy
Fuelwood	Landscape and biodiversity restoration	Recreation, tourism, harvesting and marketing of minor forest products etc.

Source: RH PNG (n.d.: 19).

Deploying the language of climate-compatible development, Rimbunan Hijau (PNG) promotes the creation of timber plantations in PNG as effective carbon sinks ('enhanced stocks'):

Plantation appears to be a good source of 'carbon sink'... As Laarman and Sedjo (1992) rightly stated, 'just as climate affects forest, forests are able to affect climate — if deforestation puts carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, reforestation takes it out'. McLaren further showed that 1-ha of radiata pine plantation in New Zealand absorbs 24 tons of carbon annually or a total of 24 million tons of carbon annually from New Zealand forest alone. Similarly, Houghton and Skole (1990) estimated that 100–200 million hectares of developing or growing forests would absorb 1 billion tons of carbon. This further indicates that a growing forest plantation will absorb more CO₂ for its growth, thus reducing the level of CO₂ in the air. (RH PNG n.d.: 19)

Through plantation production, Rimbunan Hijau sees itself as making a significant contribution to PNG's carbon mitigation efforts:

The Company as part of its Corporate Environmental responsibility will commission an independent 3rd Party to Study Silvicultural Investments in Carbon Accounting/Abatement and further through its Reforestation & Forest Management practices will calculate forest carbon contributions to the regional & global carbon cycle. This however will also benefit Papua New Guinea in its efforts for carbon trading because in order to buy or sell a good or service, it needs to be quantified. And to quantify, we need to understand how to measure forest ecosystem carbon dynamic & carbon budgets which are certainly essential to the development of carbon markets and the company is willing to undertake this as a pilot project. (RH PNG n.d.: 19)

Rimbunan Hijau's expressions of 'concern' for the global environment, and its social commitments to the nation, have failed to win the support of non-profit civil society organisations, including PNG's Eco-Forestry Forum, which has consistently adopted an adversarial stance against the company. In 2009, the Eco-Forestry Forum rejected Rimbunan Hijau's offer to sponsor 500 mangrove trees for World Environment Day because of a court case brought about by the forum which (successfully) challenged the legal extension of Rimbunan Hijau's logging concession 'Kamula Doso' in Western Province. Rimbunan Hijau's PNG public relations manager opined: 'So much for battling the global climate change and environment sustainability war' (RH PNG 2010: 3).

As Benson and Kirsch (2010: 45–6) have cautioned, strategies used by corporations to manage or neutralise critique, including idioms of ethics, health, environmentalism and corporate responsibility, generally promote business as usual. It is also the case, however, that when corporations claim to be 'ethical' and 'sustainable' it opens up spaces for public scrutiny and critique:

RH is a significant contributor to the nation's economic and social wellbeing. RH works closely with landowners, communities, NGOs and government agencies as part of its operations ... RH also takes the environment seriously. RH is Papua New Guinea's industry leader on environmentally responsible and 100 per cent legal management of forests ... RH has prided itself on an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable future for Papua New Guinea. (rhpng.com.pg)

Rimbunan Hijau's claims of corporate social responsibility have not yet resulted in a 'politics of resignation' (Benson and Kirsch 2010), and the company's attempts to legitimise its corporate power within PNG have largely failed, but Rimbunan Hijau has continued its attempt to counter negative representations through a reliance on orthodox economic understandings of 'development', 'growth' and 'global equity' (Gabriel and Wood, forthcoming). A Foucauldian critique (Lattas 2011) would suggest that the company's use of discourses, linked to SFM, corporate social responsibility and ecological modernisation, involves the pragmatic deployment of knowledge for the primary goal of governing subjects (landowner groups) and their subjectivities.

In terms of contributing to climate change solutions, Rimbunan Hijau lobbyist Alan Oxley promotes palm oil plantations as more efficient carbon sinks than natural forests:

Palm oil is also very greenhouse friendly. Properly managed, plantations absorb more carbon dioxide than natural forest. (Oxley 2009)

To pursue oil palm development in PNG, Gilford Limited, a Rimbunan Hijau subsidiary, is seeking to secure long-term tenure property rights in East New Britain through a highly controversial Special Agricultural and Business

Lease (SABL) that bypasses forestry laws and enables deforestation through the clear-felling of primary forests. The granting of SABLs allows customary land (including primary forests) to be legally converted into agricultural development on land which is leased from landowners for up to 99 years. For this reason, SABLs have been described as a mechanism for modern 'land grabs':

It is a moot point whether the companies interested in the acquisition of such land in PNG have any genuine interest in its agricultural potential, or whether they are simply looking for new ways to log PNG's native forests (Filer 2011a: 2).

The extent of the current land grab is staggering, involving almost 5 million hectares of customary land (11 per cent of PNG's total land area) (Filer 2011a: 2). In 2010, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research raised concerns that SABLs were purely a means of accessing saleable timber resources in the guise of agricultural (oil palm) development: 'there is little evidence that these proposals will lead to viable palm oil production' (Nelson et al. 2010: 11). In 2013, an academic study concluded that a large-scale land grab was occurring in PNG under the guise of oil palm (Nelson et al. 2014).

Through the SABL mechanism, Rimbunan Hijau is establishing an 'integrated rural development project' in East New Britain Province, involving timber and palm oil plantations. Ivan Lu, executive director of Rimbunan Hijau's PNG operations, claims that the rural development project that will lead its expansion into the palm oil sector in PNG will contribute some K800 million (US\$300 million) in royalties, payments, levies and other community funding, as well as providing transport and social infrastructure to local communities (ITS Global 2011b). Although Rimbunan Hijau asserts that the majority of landowners support the land reform (Anon. 2011), other landowners fear the loss of control of land for more than three generations, which they believe could have devastating consequences (Chandler 2011). Some landowners assert that the Pomio SABL was fraudulently obtained and that many of the names purporting to approve the lease on behalf of landowners were local children (including a 3-year-old). Other names were said to belong to deceased villagers (*Post-Courier* 2011).

In October 2011, the Pomio SABL in East New Britain became the centre of international condemnation following allegations of police brutality and corporate complicity. Disgruntled landowners from Pomio filed a lawsuit with the Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights (CELCOR) against Rimbunan Hijau and the state in the proposed Sigite Mukus Integrated Rural Development Project, accusing them of fraudulently depriving landowners of their customary land for a logging project. One of the plaintiffs, Paul Pavol,

who had been leading the protest, claimed that many locals were angry because the leases were granted without the approval of the majority of traditional landowners:

We have never given consent, we did not say yes, we want oil palm, and we did not even sign any documents. I think we are going to lose all the land [44,000 hectares] for 99 years, that's three generations. (ABC Radio Australia 2011)

The police were flown into Pomio on Rimbunan Hijau's commercial aircraft Tropic Air (between 3 and 6 October 2011) in alleged retaliation, and a number of people were reportedly intimidated and beaten with fan belts and sticks, and police locked young men in shipping containers (*Post-Courier* 2011). Pictures of placards were distributed anonymously via email condemning Rimbunan Hijau's presence in Pomio (John 2011).

In its formal response, Rimbunan Hijau defended the integrity of the State and the independence of the PNG constabulary:

The majority of the land owners support the palm oil projects. The recent attempts by this few disgruntled land owners with assistance from NGOs, whom do not support any form of development to derail and stop this very important project, was refused by the National Court recently. The royal constabulary (of PNG) is very independent and high integrity institution of the state of Papua New Guinea and we welcome the comments of acting police commissioner Tom Kulunga.

We regret this constant unverified adverse media release by (a) non-government organization hell bent (on) generating adverse publicity in order to keep their anti-government campaign alive for domestic and international donors. It is very much regretted and it is not helpful for a country that is seeking to develop its resources sustainably which is much needed. (Rheeneey 2011)

The commission of inquiry into the granting of SABLs found that in the Pomio SABL, no legal representation of the landowners was provided during the signing of the sublease agreements, and executives of Gilford Limited appeared to have given the sublease documents to the executives of the landowner companies without any proper explanation or advice of its contents: 'RH is no small player in the forestry business. You treated this very lightly', the commissioner told the company representatives. He added he has not seen equity for the landowners: 'Unfortunately, this is not reflected in all the agreements we have seen' (Tiden 2011).

Close scrutiny of the current position of the palm oil industry in PNG further casts Rimbunan Hijau as a rogue player if it uses the SABL mechanism for oil palm development without adhering to the principles of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). As Filer (2011a: 22) has pointed out, the two

companies responsible for PNG's entire palm oil exports (New Britain Palm Oil Ltd and Hargy Oil Palms Ltd) comply with the standards of the RSPO, pledging that their actions, directly or indirectly, do not contribute to the clearance of native forests, especially in high-conservation areas. Therefore, if Rimbunan Hijau chooses to continue its plans to develop oil palm plantations in PNG through the SABL mechanism, it needs to decide whether it supports corporate social responsibility standards set out by the RSPO and embraced by PNG's largest palm oil exporters, or whether it will pursue the agenda of its lobbyists and the PNGFIA (PNG Forest Industries Association) in supporting forest clearance for palm oil production.

Clear-felling of forests for agriculture is also at odds with the draft PNG Climate Compatible Development Policy 2013–15, which aims to 'reduce deforestation and forest degradation in commercial agriculture and forestry activities and promote afforestation/reforestation on marginal lands' (OCCD 2013).

Under the ITTO definition, Rimbunan Hijau cannot claim to be practising SFM while adopting an adversarial position in dealing with sections of the community, PNG's established oil palm industry (which complies with RSPO guidelines), as well as the international community which opposes SABLs because they are seen to be outside best practice. Although Rimbunan Hijau (PNG) says it is genuinely interested in improving corporate practice by introducing incremental reform through green technology, verification schemes and community engagement, it is yet to develop collaborative relationships with environmental or social justice NGOs. In this sense the company has adopted a largely defensive position with broader civil society.

Concluding Remarks

Despite Rimbunan Hijau's claims of social and environmental responsibility, including a commitment towards a greener future, the company's involvement in PNG's highly controversial land-use scheme (SABL) has exacerbated the perception that it is still engaging in unethical commodity production.

In May 2015, four years after the policy board of the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) approved the National Programme Document which set out how the PNG government proposed to achieve a state of 'REDD plus readiness' within three years (Filer 2011b), forestry minister Douglas Tomuriesa announced that the REDD+ mechanism in Papua New Guinea is

'ready for business'. He added that PNG is prepared to utilise the forests for REDD programs, which includes the conservation of land for REDD credits (Dateline Pacific 2015).

Signalling a move towards SFM, the National Executive Council has endorsed a total ban on log exports by 2020 (ibid.). However, PNG's policy and laws regarding REDD processes must also address fundamental issues of land tenure, ownership, prior informed consent and equitable benefit sharing. Corporate investment will need to complement domestic efforts and contribute towards enhancing SFM and sustainable development by becoming more transparent, more equitable and more accountable to local resource users.

To adhere to the principles of SFM embedded in REDD+, Rimbunan Hijau will need to work in tandem with approaches that seek to achieve global ecological sustainability and support a low-carbon economy nationally, while avoiding measures of social control that alienate sections of the community and broader civil society. This is line with Strategy 1 (7.4.2) of the draft PNG Climate Compatible Development Policy 2013–15:

Encourage investments in natural capital such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, water and mineral resources that promotes sustainable development and respect for community rights and livelihood whilst safeguarding national interest (OCCD 2013: 36).

A key idea of SFM under ecological modernisation theory is that markets for 'ethical commodities' can improve the ability of the private sector to internalise the environmental costs of production. Through branding and market differentiation, ethical commodities have the potential to produce economic rent (Guthman 2002, 2004), which provides a means for compensating for best practice in social and environmental management, while redistributing profit to rural communities. In terms of SFM, the success of multifunctional integrated approaches to climate capitalism such as REDD+ relies on establishing cooperative partnerships between landowners, governments, companies and non-profit civil society organisations — these are all 'brand-building' exercises that can redefine forestry values and impact corporate brands positively. Although opportunities for reform are made possible through such schemes, it is questionable whether they will bring about productive change in corporate approaches to social and environmental relationships in host countries such as PNG. As multinational companies such as Rimbunan Hijau compete for market share in the newly emerging international governance regime for forests, evidence of voluntary compliance with socially and environmentally sustainable development is increasingly necessary to demonstrate global standards of corporate social responsibility which require business activities to be compatible with robust social, environmental and ecological safeguards.

The persistence of international critique, social and environmental campaigns, and landowner resistance groups indicates that the ongoing presence of Rimbunan Hijau in the forests of Oceania will increasingly be defined by its ability and willingness to deliver outcomes defined by local perspectives and desires, as well as national and global objectives. Instead of deploying ecological-modernist discourse as a strategy to dilute the political impulse for environmental reforms (Hajer 1995), a commitment to thinking outside the borders of ecological modernisation to provide tangible and equitable benefits will need to be part of Rimbunan Hijau's strategy in order for it to deliver on its promises of corporate social responsibility and SFM. This broader strategy will need to include addressing the power imbalances between industry and landowners.

I have argued that in the expanding frontiers of global climate capitalism, new models of corporate forestry management in PNG are being challenged by the politics of 'friction' (Tsing 2005), which include ongoing forms of participatory politics. An increased focus on the use of corporate and industry discourse to influence the policy networks of Oceania's forestry industry may contribute to new opportunities for holding corporations accountable to their promises.

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