

Mary Nichols
Chair, California Air Resources Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Cc. Governor Gavin Newsom

18 September, 2019

Re: CARB should reject Tropical Forest Offsets

Dear Chair Nichols,

We, the undersigned organizations dedicated to protecting forests, and upholding environmental justice, human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples, urge the California Air Resources Board to REJECT endorsement of the California Tropical Forest Standard (TFS). TFS would lay the groundwork for accepting forest offset credits such as Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) offset credits into California's carbon trading system, and is explicitly intended by CARB for utilization by the controversial International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Carbon Offsetting Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA), among other emissions trading entities.

The forests of the world are facing unprecedented disaster due to long-term trends like rising global temperatures and attacks on Indigenous rights, as well as the rush for short-term profits from agricultural commodities such as beef, soy, palm oil, timber, and paper. **In order to curb catastrophic climate change, deforestation and forest fires, we need strong regulations on industry, demarcation of Indigenous Peoples' territories, and enforcement of existing laws to prevent illegal land grabbing and deforestation -- NOT offsets-based approaches like the TFS.**

No compliance market in the world accepts REDD credits because they do not reduce emissions

Preservation of tropical forests is critical, but the TFS proposed by the California Air Resources Board is a profoundly misguided and irremediably flawed approach to tropical forest conservation. Because of its widely-acknowledged fundamental flaws (additionality, leakage, accounting, non-permanence, etc.), no compliance market in the world accepts REDD credits. Adopting the TFS does nothing to change the fact that it is virtually impossible for California or any other entity to guarantee that REDD credits on the ground will be "real, additional, quantifiable, permanent, verifiable [or] enforceable."

In addition, leading compliance markets are moving away from the notion of international offsets altogether, as evidenced by the EU's intention to phase out of international carbon credits after 2020. Indeed, it is no longer acceptable for governments to make a choice between reducing fossil emissions and reducing tropical deforestation. Developed country governments must cut emissions at source and stop the drivers of deforestation linked to their overconsumption and unsustainable lifestyles. The TFS, as the foundation of an international offsets program, takes the world precisely in the wrong direction and abets the expansion of fossil fuel pollution, one of the main causes of climate change.

Tropical forest carbon offsets violate Indigenous and human rights and pose threats to cultural survival

REDD-type projects have a well-documented history of contributing to violence, forced decision-making, land grabs, and other human rights abuses for many Indigenous groups and forest-dwelling people around

the globe. REDD-type projects divide Indigenous Peoples and subject them to grossly disproportionate economic power, intimidation and coercion. The California Air Resources Board (CARB) has, to date, repeatedly shown itself to be deeply insensitive to these issues and to concerns raised about them – and it is clearly beyond the mandate, the interests and the ability of CARB to monitor programs in foreign jurisdictions in order to prevent violations. Furthermore, the TFS’s human rights standards are far below the norms established by international law and impossible for California to police and enforce

The fires raging in the Amazon, fueled by the regressive administration of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, bear witness to the truth that many have raised about REDD+ programs for decades: economic incentives for forest conservation alone will never outcompete the economic incentives for forest destruction. REDD was designed to give polluters a cheap way out of reducing their pollution at source and to supposedly incentivize landholders to manage forests and monoculture tree plantations in exchange for payments that would eclipse profits from deforestation-driving land uses like agriculture or grazing. REDD, like the TFS, was never designed to combat widespread state-sanctioned violence of the sort that has been unleashed in Brazil and could rapidly be unleashed elsewhere.

California puts its climate reputation at risk through aviation offsets

CARB says that “[the TFS] is anticipated to serve as a robust, replicable model for other GHG emissions mitigation programs such as the International Civil Aviation Organization's Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA) and other emerging programs.” As CARB emissions data has evidenced, aviation is one of the sectors with the fastest emissions growth. CORSIA is designed to achieve "carbon neutral emissions growth" – a concept that is scientifically and technically indefensible. ICAO functions as an opaque and non-transparent entity that denies access of civil society organizations to its proceedings, and its figures for calculating emissions are subject to no peer review. For these reasons and others, the growth of aviation emissions needs to be capped and reversed, not supposedly offset with projects that result in land conflicts and other abuses, as aviation offset projects have already done in Madagascar and Papua New Guinea.

By explicitly preparing to endorse an offset protocol for use in the CORSIA emissions trading system without first doing an environmental review or analysis of the risks of CORSIA itself, CARB puts California’s international climate credibility at risk. This move essentially allows California’s international climate reputation to be used as cover for ICAO, a pro-industry organization which itself has no credible mechanisms to facilitate civil society engagement or deal with environmental or human rights grievances.

We strongly urge the CARB to reject consideration of the Tropical Forest Standard (TFS), and any attempts to accept Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) credits into California’s carbon trading system, or to promote/endorse such a standard for entities beyond California borders. We urge California to take a much more defensible regulatory approach to the climate crisis by protecting California’s own globally important forests through curbing industrial forestry abuses such as indiscriminate clearcutting, ending public procurement of tropical deforestation-linked commodities and reducing imports of those commodities into our market, and by pursuing a managed decline of the state’s use of domestic and imported fossil fuels.

Sincerely,

Isaac Rojas - Nele Marien, Friends of the Earth International

Mira Kapfinger, Stay Grounded Network, International
Pascoe Sabido, Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), EU
Ninawa Inu, Federação do Povo Huni kui do Estado do Acre, Brazil
Francisco Almenar, Companhia de Jesus, Brazil
Maria Luisa Mendonça, Network for Social Justice and Human Rights, Brazil
Luiz Afonso Rosario, LIBRES - Liga Brasil de Responsabilidade Socioambiental, Brazil
Elder Andrade de Paula, NUPESDAO/UFAC Amazônia-Brasil, Brazil
Yuyun Harmono, WALHI - Friends of the Earth Indonesia, Indonesia
Choony Kim, Korea Federation for Environmental Movements, South Korea
Ana Maria R. Nemenzo, WomanHealth Philippines, Philippines
Hasan Mehedi, CLEAN (Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network), Bangladesh
Claire Bleakley, GE Free NZ, New Zealand
Franklin Bruinstroop, Friends of the Earth Australia, Australia
Danielle van Oijen, Milieudefensie - Friends of the Earth Netherlands, Netherlands
Friedrich Wulf, Pro Natura - Friends of the Earth Switzerland, Switzerland
Sylvain Angerand, Canopee, France
Khaled Gaiji, Les Amis de la Terre France, France
Sam Van den plas, Carbon Market Watch, Belgium
Christophe Murroccu, Mouvement Ecologique, Luxembourg
Sarah Sexton, The Corner House, United Kingdom
Asad Rehman, War on Want, United Kingdom
Helena Paul, Co-Director, EcoNexus, United Kingdom
Sandra Bell, Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland, United Kingdom
Natasa Crnkovic, Center for Environment, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Aleksandra-Anja Dragomirović, Center for Environment, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Besik Kalandadze, Ecological Farming Assotiation of Georgia 'SEMA', Georgia
Greens Movement of Georgia / Friends of the Earth-Georgia, Georgia
Geoffrey Nansove Kamese, Bio Vision Africa (BIVA), Uganda
Nnimmo Bassey, Health of Mother Earth Foundation/No REDD in Africa Network, Nigeria
Kenneth Nana Amoateng, Abibiman Foundation, Ghana
Faustin Vuningoma, Rwanda Climate Change and Development Network, Rwanda
Dr. Chris Macoloo, World Neighbors, Kenya
Kwami Kpondzo, Les Amis de la Terre-Togo, Togo
Alejandro Argumedo, Asociación ANDES, Perú
Teresa Perez, World Rainforest Movement, Uruguay
Souparna Lahiri, Global Forest Coalition, Netherlands/Paraguay

Gabriela Vega Téllez and Heriberto Salas Amac, Coordinadora de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Oriente del Estado de México en Defensa de la Tierra, el Agua y su Cultura, Mexico
Ricardo Navarro, CESTA, El Salvador
Beatrice Olivastri, Friends of the Earth Canada, Canada
Gary Graham Hughes, Biofuelwatch, United Kindgom/USA
Alberto Saldamando, Indigenous Environmental Network, USA and Canada
Jeff Conant, Friends of the Earth United States, USA
Jane Williams, California Communities Against Toxics, USA
Andrea Vidaurre, Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCA EJ), USA
Mitch Jones, Food & Water Watch, USA
Lydia Simas, Grassroots International, USA
David Braun, Rootskeeper, USA
Elaine Tanner, Friends For Environmental Justice, USA
Tabitha Tripp, Shawnee Forest Defense!, USA
Teresa Greene, Individual American Indian, USA
Lorette Picciano, Rural Coalition, USA
Rudy Arredondo, National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association, USA
Linda Rudolph, Center for Climate Change and Health, USA
Margaret Reeves, Pesticide Action Network, USA
Suguet Lopez , Organizacion en California de Lideres Campesinas, Inc., USA
Shannon Biggs, Movement Rights, USA
Tia Oros Peters, Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples, USA
Lou-Anne Fauteck Makes-Marks, Ph.D., Sacred America, USA
Osprey Orielle Lake, Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN), USA
Beverly Collins-Hall, American Indian Mothers Inc., USA
Christie Keith, GAIA: Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, USA
Savi Horne, North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project, USA