

Panel to assess carbon credits

THE Federal Government has appointed an expert panel to assess proposed methods for developing carbon credits under the Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI).

"The domestic offsets integrity committee will ensure that CFI carbon credits meet the highest international standards and represent genuine reductions in carbon pollution," the Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, Mark Dreyfus, said.

"Farmers, other landholders and waste facility operators can already start planning projects to permanently plant native species, flare landfill gas and reduce methane from manure generated in piggeries," he said.

The panel will begin assessing further methodologies immediately, providing more opportunities for farmers and other landholders to benefit from the carbon market.

"The committee is comprised of internationally renowned experts with a diverse range of board experience and scientific expertise in areas relevant to the CFI including sustainable agriculture, soil carbon sequestration and revegetation," Mr Dreyfus said.

The members of the committee are Professor Tim Reeves (chair); Dr Tony Press; Professor Lynette Abbott, Rebecca Burdon, Dr Brian Keating and Shayleen Thompson.

This committee replaces the interim domestic offsets integrity committee set up to fast track assessment of methodologies submitted for assessment prior to commencement of the CFI.

■ Details: www.climatechange.gov.au

Questions over carbon stores

By CAMERON THOMPSON

THE expiry of the global Kyoto Agreement on climate change at the end of 2012 may kick-start mainstream carbon farming in Australia, according to a leading CFI exponent.

Hamilton farmer Mark Wootton, whose Jigsaw aggregation is based in the west of the State, says that while the Kyoto deal was welcomed as key support for carbon abatement, its provisions excluded the use of plantation timber to store carbon.

"The Kyoto Agreement was based on the assumption that a tree spills all its stored carbon when it is harvested," Mr Wootton said.

"But in this one room, there is a truck load of timber and the stored carbon remains. Under Kyoto, a farmer with a plantation has to lock it up for 100 years.

"Obviously that's not helping farmers who need to earn an income. They want to make investments they can pass on to their children."

Mr Wootton said his efforts to adopt carbon-effective practices had included the planting of 537 hectares of plantation timber – mostly spotted gum – between 1998 and 2009.

"We'll start to harvest from 2020," he said.

"There will be 180-200 saw logs a year and each will be full of carbon to be stored in homes and in construction," he said.



Hamilton farmer Mark Wootton said carbon farming was all about managing risk. "We have decided to be more efficient," he said. "We have deep-rooted perennial grasses. Our cattle are crossbred and our water is stored in dams that are deep to avoid evaporation."

Mr Wootton says that although the Federal Government supported the Kyoto agreement, it was sympathetic to the needs of farmers who were lobbying for a carbon farming methodology based on plantation timber.

"With income from the saw logs plus a return on the stored carbon, we are heading in the right direction," he said.

"If at the same time they can agree to do something with the waste product – the small branches that just rot on the

"We can use the saw logs and we can access carbon offsets as they become available," he said.

"CFI is still under development and so far the price is not there, but we will have the option available to us.

"In the meantime, we are improving our efficiency. We are using less energy. Our soil temperatures are higher in winter and that makes more grass available. Our sheep have good shelter and that increases lambing. We are making carbon sense and economic sense at the same time."

Mr Wootton said heavy rain and a cold change that affected the Hamilton region in 2005 caused high death rates among newly-shorn sheep in local flocks.

"We were able to put our sheep into the trees," he said.

"They survived when we could have lost our key Merino genetics. If that had happened, it would have cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars. That's an example of what I mean by efficiency."

Mr Wootton, Melbourne researcher Professor Richard Ekhardt and Australian Farm Institute executive director Mick Keogh debated developments in carbon farming at a forum staged by Marcus Oldham College at Geelong recently.

Mr Wootton said he wanted to implement a range of initiatives, including a feed conversion program being developed by Prof Eckhard.

By adding oils to the diet of cattle, feed conversion could be improved and methane production reduced.