

California lawmaker opposes tropical forest standard

16 Aug 2019 13:29 (-07:00 GMT)

San Francisco, 16 August (Argus) – A rift has emerged in the California Legislature that may complicate the state's path forward to expand the reach of its climate work to tropical forests. State senator Bob Wieckowski (D) questioned the environmental integrity of international offsets from the forestry sector in a 13 August letter to California Air Resources Board (ARB) chair Mary Nichols and state secretary for environmental protection Jared Blumenfeld.

"Although we all share the goal of reducing tropical deforestation, the risks that international forest offset programs present to climate change mitigation and to tropical forests communities are simply too high for California's endorsement," said Wieckowski, who chairs the Budget Subcommittee that controls cap-and-trade dollars.

The proposal waiting endorsement, known as the Tropical Forest Standard, would establish criteria for jurisdictions that want to receive offset credits for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from tropical deforestation and degradation.

Four state assembly members [in June](#) urged the ARB to adopt the standard, provided that the agency could vouch for the emissions reductions. The group included some lawmakers that have been critical of the use of carbon offsets in California's carbon market. Their letter indicated that, perhaps, the ARB would now have lawmakers' blessing to move forward.

But Wieckowski warned of a "landslide" of false credits that could compromise California's own climate goals, should the state eventually decide to expand cap and trade and allow the use of international offsets.

The ARB board will reconsider adoption of the standard [in September](#) after putting off a vote late last year in the face of vocal opposition.

Environmental justice groups said that an updated standard, released last month, did not address their concerns.

We are against "using international offsets, when those investments could be coming to the state," California Environmental Justice Alliance policy director Katie Valenzuela said. The group opposes the use of carbon offsets in general and would prefer to see industries regulated by the carbon market reduce their own emissions.

Those companies can use offsets for up to 8pc of their cap-and-trade compliance obligations through 2020. The percentage drops to 4pc in 2021 before rising to 6pc five years later. California in 2021 will also start requiring at least half of all offsets used for compliance to provide "direct environmental benefits" to the state.

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