Less land clearing, emission targets met

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REDUCED land clearing by farmers is the only reason Australia is able to meet its greenhouse gas emissions targets, according to Co-operative Research Centre for Greenhouse Accounting CEO, Dr Michael Robinson.

The Federal Government has committed Australia to keeping average annual greenhouse gas emissions between 2008 and 2012 to no more than 108 per cent of 1990 levels.

In 1990, Australia's net emissions of greenhouse gases were almost 552 million tonnes, and by 2004 these had increased by 12.8 million tonnes or 2.3pc.

Dr Robinson (pictured) said this meant the Government's voluntary target was likely to be met, due almost solely to reduced land clearing, particularly in Queensland and NSW.

"Estimated greenhouse gas emissions from land clearing in 2004 were equivalent to 53 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, a reduction of 75.6 million tonnes or about 59 per cent since 1990." Dr Robinson said. Dr Robinson shared these developments at a recent briefing organised by the CRC in Sydney on Climate Change, Carbon and Plants. Also at the briefing, NSW Department of Primary Industries' New Forests research leader, Dr Annette Cowie, outlined features of the NSW Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme (NGAS), implemented in 2003.

NGAS enables companies responsible for emitting carbon dioxide to purchase abatement certificates to offset their emissions.

Certificates can be created through renewable energy initiatives, improved energy efficiency and eligible reafforestation activities.

Under NGAS, carbon dioxide is currently traded at about $14.50 per tonne.

Dr Cowie (pictured) said that the States and Territories have proposed a national emissions trading scheme, suggested to commence on January 1, 2010.

Dr Robinson said it was unfortunate for Australian farmers that the Federal government had not committed to a [national] carbon trading
scheme such as that in Europe.

"The Europeans realised that technology alone would not achieve reductions in energy emissions: market processes were needed to help" push
along that change.

"If Australia had a national emissions trading scheme, and if land-based offsets were included,
Australian farmers may be eligible for credits from actions that reduced or offset emissions.

"These could include tree planting, conversion from cropping or annual pasture to perennial pasture, and avoided clearing."