

20 November 2015

Big firms are still not acting on their deforestation promises



Corporate inaction on deforestation could scupper hopes of keeping global warming at 2 °C, according to experts behind two major deforestation progress reports.

Emissions pledges from governments to next month's UN climate summit in Paris will put us on a road to potentially catastrophic 2.7 °C warming.

But deforestation rates already agreed by corporations 14 months ago would have been

sufficient to bring this down to safe levels.

Yet there has been a lack of corporate action, despite pledges made in September 2014, when the New York Declaration on Forests was published to a fanfare of publicity.

At the time, 300 corporations – including Dunkin’ Donuts, KFC, Pizza Hut and McDonalds – promised to eliminate deforestation from their products’ production processes by 2030.

Missed opportunity

But so far little progress has been made. “We are not on track,” said Charlotte Streck, of the Netherlands-based consultants Climate Focus, author of [one of this week’s reports](#). “There are no signs that the annual rate of forest loss is slowing.”

This is a major missed opportunity, according to Stephen Donofrio of the Washington think tank Forest Trends, a co-author of the Climate Focus report, who says deforestation cuts could have bridged the gap in emission pledges needed to limit global warming at safe levels.

A second report, [the Forest 500](#) compiled by the Oxford-based Global Canopy Programme, which assesses the major companies, investors and governments behind global deforestation, found that only 8 per cent of the big deforesting companies had so far signed up to the pledge.

Banks and other big funders of the plunder did even worse, with just 1 per cent on side, says Andrew Mitchell, the director of the Global Canopy Programme.

What’s more, Paris looks set to fail on forests more generally – only 40 of the 122 government pledges included specific actions for cutting emissions from forests and land use.

Deforestation continues to be a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. If the planet could achieve zero net deforestation, that could cut annual greenhouse-gas emissions by between 5 and 8 billion tonnes, a fifth of the total, according to Streck.

And staunching emissions from deforestation is the cheapest way of cutting emissions, according to Steve Schwartzman of the Environmental Defense Fund in Washington DC.

Brazil’s 80-per-cent reduction in deforestation over the past decade has kept 3 billion tonnes out of the air. More, says Mitchell, than the entire EU carbon trading programme.