

# Temer's deforestation policies put Paris goals at risk, scientists warn

by Sue Branford on 24 July 2018 |

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- *A letter in the journal Nature Climate Change penned by ten prominent Brazilian scientists is making a splash in major Brazilian media outlets. They warn that weak environmental governance by the Temer administration and the bancada ruralista, agribusiness and mining lobby, is resulting in policies that are increasing deforestation.*
- *The scientists especially singled out Temer, noting that: "the President of Brazil has signed provisional acts and decrees lowering environmental licensing requirements, suspending the ratification of indigenous lands, reducing the size of protected areas and facilitating land grabbers to obtain the deeds of illegally deforested areas."*

- *The scientists say that these policies are undermining attempts to reduce deforestation and the CO2 emissions that clear cutting causes. As a result, Brazil may need to spend US\$2-5 trillion additionally to curb its carbon emissions by other means in order to hit the nation's Paris Climate Agreement targets.*
- *The warning comes as Brazil gears up for October national elections. Environmental issues rarely have a great influence on Brazilian voters, but the scientists hope that knowledge of the severe and costly consequences of the current government's policies could help better inform Brazilians as they go to the polls.*



*Deforested plain in the Brazilian Amazon, now used for cattle. Image by Rhett A. Butler / Mongabay*

In a hard-hitting letter, published in *Nature Climate Change* ([https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-018-0213-y.epdf?no\\_publisher\\_access=1&r3\\_referer=nature](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-018-0213-y.epdf?no_publisher_access=1&r3_referer=nature)), ten Brazilian scientists warn that their country's current government policies have the potential to greatly increase greenhouse gas emissions due to deforestation, making it increasingly unlikely that Brazil will achieve the carbon reduction commitments it pledged in the Paris Climate Agreement. If the government of Michel Temer continues backing administrative and legislative measures that encourage deforestation by landowners, the scientists caution, the nation will need to employ far more expensive carbon-cutting measures in other sectors, if it is to meet the carbon

reduction commitments it made in Paris at the end of 2015. They say that such measures would cost the country an additional US\$2 trillion, and possibly US\$5 trillion.

According to the scientists, "the President of Brazil has signed provisional acts and decrees lowering environmental licensing requirements, suspending the ratification of indigenous lands, reducing the size of protected areas and facilitating land grabbers to obtain the deeds of illegally deforested areas." They conclude that these actions "could undermine the success of Brazil's CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions through the control of deforestation."

They say that the current government's actions help "explain how a political crisis can be a major driver for increasing deforestation and carbon emissions in the country." The scientists point to the administration's failure to enforce the rule of law, and to its offering of incentives that reward deforestation as major roadblocks to meeting Brazil's Paris goals.



*Amazon deforestation as seen from a satellite. Image courtesy of NASA.*

Deforestation and other environmental issues rarely achieve front-page status in Brazil, but many of the country's newspapers are reporting the scientists' urgent warning. The Observatório do Código Florestal (<http://www.observatoriodoflorestal.org.br/blog/entrevista-pesquisador->

raoni-rajao-fala-sobre-a-relacao-do-desmatamento-com-o-acordo-de-paris/), a network of environmental NGOs, asked one of the researchers, Raoni Rajão, why he thought the letter was attracting so much attention:

The message is very direct: if the government doesn't pay attention to its environmental policies and its governance with respect to changes in the soil and in deforestation, it's going to use up its carbon budget and have no way of developing the country. And it will become very difficult to achieve its Paris commitments. And all this will have a heavy economic cost. This message was well captured and reached the public.

With general elections planned for October, electoral politics is currently dominating Brazil's news cycle. That being the case, the Observatório do Código Florestal asked Raoni Rajao whether the Nature Climate Change letter might affect the outcome. He replied:

It's very difficult to know if we are going to manage to influence the elections. At the moment what we see is that, with the exception of one or two candidates, the environment is absolutely invisible in electoral debate. If we at least manage to get the message of carbon costs and development options onto the agenda, we will have achieved a great deal.

And who pays the cost, if Brazil doesn't fulfil its Paris commitments?

Raoni Rajao answered:

Everyone will pay the bill because we're not going to manage to live in a world with global warming of less than two degrees.... sea levels will rise and we will have extreme climate events and disasters. And it will harm our agriculture, because climate models show that states like Mato Grosso and even Matopiba, [a region that includes four Cerrado states,] where there are two harvests a year, with soy and another smaller crop [like corn], won't be able to do this anymore, because the drought period will become longer, while the rainy season will be shorter.

What the study showed was that, if Brazil exceeds its [carbon reduction] goals, or if other countries do, this is going to have a cost, and a very high cost.... If this happens, it's likely that Brazil will be held to account for this, and it will affect its relations with other countries and its exports.

Brazil is presently the world's seventh largest greenhouse gas emitter. In Paris, it pledged to cut those emissions by significantly reducing deforestation in the Amazon and elsewhere. However, say the ten scientists: "The abandonment of deforestation control policies [by the current administration] and the political support for predatory agricultural practices make it impossible to meet targets consistent with Brazil's contribution to a 2°C[elsius] world."



*A solitary tree where Amazon rainforest once stood. Agricultural lands have drastically less carbon storage capacity as compared to native rainforest. Image by Rhett A. Butler / Mongabay.*

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