

# Masalai i tokaut

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## Alan Oxley, Rimbunan Hijau and the Australian Government

*Rimbunan Hijau's recruitment of Australian Alan Oxley as a lobbyist and public relations adviser has proved rewarding in protecting its illegal and unsustainable timber operations in Papua New Guinea.*

*Oxley is a climate change sceptic and free-trade advocate with an almost unique access to the very highest levels of the Australian government. He has extensive links to the mining and coal industries in both Australia and the United States and is part of the 'carbon club' that has encircled John Howard and hijacked Australia's climate policy.*

*Oxley has used his high level political access to undermine legitimate attempts to control the flow of illegal timber into Australia while his public relations companies have spun a web of lies defending Rimbunan Hijau's human rights abuses and rapacious logging practices.*



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**Climate Sceptic (Definition):** *a person who denies that carbon dioxide emissions cause climate change or that increased global warming should be of concern.*

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At some time in the next century, as the planet attempts to deal with runaway climate change, people will ask 'why did it take so long for rich countries to accept the reality of climate change and importantly, start reducing carbon emissions. Blame will inevitably be placed at the feet of corrupt and powerful individuals who knew the truth, but told lies to enrich themselves and their friends. Alan Oxley is one such man that will not escape the harsh glare of historical judgement.

### Who is Alan Oxley?

In simple terms, Oxley is a double-agent. He presents himself as an independent expert on climate change issues, a regular contributor to the climate change debate in Australia and part of the Australian business establishment. A man to be trusted. However he is also on the pay of some of the most polluting industries in Australia, part of a shady cabal of spin-doctors who have led the Howard government into their ridiculed position of climate change-deniers. And he works for Rimbunan Hijau.

## Oxley, ITS Global and the global spin of climate change

Oxley's consulting company is Melbourne based **ITS Global** – a 'hired gun for powerful business voices' that specialises in 'spin creation' in trade and environment issues<sup>1</sup>.

ITS Global is also closely associated with the worst neo-liberal think tanks in the United States including the American Enterprise Institute, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the George C. Marshall Institute, the Heritage Foundation and the International Policy Network. It is also involved with and industry-funded climate-sceptic groups in the US such as "Frontiers of Freedom". ITS Global even edits the Asia Pacific website of climate-sceptic front group "Tech Central" that is run by a Washington PR firm.

ITS Global administers a number of web sites including [www.climatechangeissues.com](http://www.climatechangeissues.com) for another climate sceptic group, APEC Studies Centre (which Oxley also heads) and which is another part of Australian Prime Minister John Howard's trusted inner circle of policy advisors.

Some of the world's biggest and worst carbon emitters fund ITS Global, APEC Studies Group and Alan Oxley himself - Rio Tinto, Xstrata, Alcoa, Exxon Mobil and BHP Steel to name just a few.

Oxley is a member of the shadowy Lavoisier Group – an extremist neo-liberal think-tank created to tell people that climate change does not exist. The Lavoisier Group ridicules the science of global warming, supports 'scientific' sceptics and portrays those pushing for emissions cuts as extremists and fundamentalists themselves. According to the Lavoisier Group climate change '*is the greatest fraud ever perpetuated on the Australian public*' and '*the most serious challenge to Australian sovereignty since the Japanese [in World War II]*'.

It will come as no surprise to know that Oxley has been instrumental in creating John Howard's position as a climate change sceptic and is the central man behind the creation of the shameful climate change 'policies' of the Australian Liberal Party. Alan Oxley has been described as '*the most omnipresent voice telling John Howard that emissions cuts by Australia are unwarranted and unaffordable*'<sup>1</sup>.

Both Oxley and ITS Global have worked consistently to persuade John Howard against adopting measures that would cut Australia's emissions. It has also done large amounts of work on other issues close to Howard's heart including backing the 2002 US-Australia Free Trade Agreement and defending the corrupt Australian Wheat Board<sup>2</sup>.

Most importantly, ITS Global provided the research advice that Howard used to justify his back flip on ending illegal timber imports in 2006.

## Why would Oxley want illegal timber to enter Australia?

Alan Oxley has spent three years being paid to defend the operations of the worst logging company in PNG – Malaysian giant **Rimbunan Hijau**. He has been paid to create for them a good clean image and to protect the company from international initiatives to control the trade in illegal and unsustainable timber. Oxley has used his unique political access developed as a free trade advocate and climate change sceptic to defend the human rights abuses of Rimbunan Hijau.

He has also recently been recruited to support notorious Tasmanian logging giant Gunns Limited and its controversial pulp mill proposal that has become mired in political corruption in Tasmania.

The secret to Oxley's influence is his connections to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (developed while he was former ambassador to GATT). Oxley had a direct line to DFAT Secretary Ashton Calvert before he went off to work for Rio Tinto and Woodside, and DFAT still commission

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<sup>1</sup> See: Guy Pearce, 'High and Dry', Penguin Press.

<sup>2</sup> See: Clive Hamilton; 'Scorcher: The dirty politics of climate change'. Black Inc Agenda Press

work from Oxley despite the fact he runs a clear ideological line as a paid gun working as a lobbyist for industry. Both Oxley and Calvert sit on Howard's Foreign Affairs Council. Indeed in 2001 Oxley was awarded a Centenary Medal by John Howard!

It was this web of connections that attracted Rimbunan Hijau to invest heavily in acquiring the services of ITS Global. Oxley was recruited by RH to help get the Australian government out of its 2004 election pledge to end illegal timber imports.

Working on behalf of RH and the Australian Timber Importers Federation, Oxley first vilified Masalai, PNG Eco-Forestry Forum and Greenpeace on its [www.forestryanddevelopment.com](http://www.forestryanddevelopment.com) website. He then attempted to have our Masalai web-site closed and our investigators revealed and 'dealt-with'. Oxley then helped climate sceptic Forest Minister, Eric Abetz, to draft his pathetic voluntary policy on illegal logging as an alternative to stopping the flow of illegally harvest timber into Australia. Since then, his publications have been released regularly, each claiming that RH logging operations is the economic salvation of PNG. A group of academics based in Australian Universities, to be discussed in the next edition of Masalai, have gladly peddled the industry lies in return for cash.

Alan Oxley, a Guest of Honor at the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the RH Group in Sarawak, Malaysia 2006. Sitting on his right is James Lau and Mr J.K Balasubramaniam of Rimbunan Hijau PNG.



Oxley was also tasked with repairing the image of RH after the scandal of their illicit ownership of Kina Securities broke in 2006 (see [www.masalai-i-tokaut.com](http://www.masalai-i-tokaut.com) ). Kina Securities was attempting to buy a bank (Maybank) which would have then been used to facilitate transfer pricing activities on behalf of Kina Securities parent, Rimbunan Hijau.

### However, eventually the truth gets out

As the Weekend Australian reported in October 2006:

*“What do you do when your logging company can't shake off continuing negative publicity about illegal logging and human rights abuses, generated by a never-ending series of reports by international financial institutions, aid donors, journalists and non-government organisations?”*

*If you are multinational logger Rimbunan Hijau, you call in a team of Australian spin doctors to give the company a makeover.”*

Earlier this year, Oxley went one step too far in his defence of Rimbunan Hijau when he suggested a report detailing numerous human rights abuses by Rimbunan Hijau in PNG (which had been funded by the UK government) had been fabricated.

Oxley was forced to publish this humiliating apology in the Australian media.

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In an article in *The Australian* newspaper dated July 4, 2007, when asked to respond to allegations by ACF and Greenpeace that the retainer of ITS Global (the consultant to the Tasmanian Government in respect to the impact of a proposed pulp mill) was "unwise and surprising", the director of ITS Global, Mr Oxley, referred to allegations having been "fabricated" by ACF. Whilst Mr Oxley was critical of ACF, it was not his intention to suggest ACF had concocted the material upon which the report, "Bulldozing Progress", draws. If that impression was given, then Mr Oxley withdraws the same without reservation and apologises.

Now with the Howard government on the ropes because of its Oxley-inspired position on climate change, we suspect that Oxley will not find the corridors of Canberra quite so welcoming in the future.