Preface

Nothing pleases me more than to look down on a primary tropical rainforest, the greenness interrupted here and there by a tree in flower, the canopy punctuated by great emergents and knowing that the whole teems with life. It is also satisfying to look across the landscape to where a dark line of a thriving plantation provides a contrast to the grassland in the foreground. While one can romanticize about forests, I have set out to be realistic in assessing their role in augmenting and complementing the deep cuts that need to be made in the burning of fossil fuels.

This book took some 14 months to write, but its gestation was much longer. As a boy, biking to school in London, I was concerned about the impacts of exhausts from factories and vehicles, and in an early physics lesson I saw how heat rays were trapped by carbon dioxide. I was only partly reassured by the knowledge that trees were splitting carbon dioxide molecules and incorporating the carbon: how effective would forests be against the inexorable increase in emissions?

During my work in agricultural development I became acquainted with diverse forests in many countries. On my journey to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), to work as a soil and water conservation officer, I marveled at the endless savannahs of southern Africa. Later, I visited the vast tropical rainforests of Indonesia, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, but I also saw their destruction first hand. Later still, I achieved an ambition of living and working in Papua New Guinea, much of the time researching sustainable alternatives to logging.

Returning to Australia to live adjacent to the rare remaining rainforests of far north Queensland, I spent several instructive years as a volunteer with Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands Inc. (TREAT). I believe there is no better place than TREAT to learn the practicalities of rainforest restoration (from seed collection to maintenance regimes) and the establishment of wildlife corridors.

In 2004 I was fortunate in being offered a position as lecturer in socioeconomics and environmental policy at the nearby School for Field Studies (SFS), an American school affiliated with Boston University. The SFS philosophy emphasizes field-based projects. I took the opportunity of employing students (to our mutual advantage) to measure the carbon stored and its value in the tropical rainforests and plantations of the area.
These experiences resulted in the delivery of a paper on the economics and ecology of carbon sequestration and a workshop on emission trading to the United States Society for Ecological Economics Conference, in New York, in June 2007. Publisher Edward Elgar had mounted a stall at the conference and there were conversations with the publisher’s representative, Heather Perkins, about the need for a book on the role of forestry in climate change policy. In October 2007 I was delighted to receive an invitation from Alan Sturmer to produce this book.

Chapters in the book are designed to stand alone, but they are also unavoidably interdependent. It is impossible to discuss the effectiveness of the inclusion of forestry in the Kyoto Protocol and the potential for the inclusion of the reduction in deforestation in post-Kyoto arrangements without background in carbon markets. And underlying the role of forestry in carbon markets is the need for understanding the practicalities of measuring, and the difficulties of guaranteeing, the carbon captured by forests.

The nations of the world are due to convene in Copenhagen in December 2009 to discuss, and hopefully to formulate, the successor to the Kyoto Protocol, which expires at the end of 2012. The election of Barack Obama changed the political landscape; comprehensive participation in addressing climate change now seems more likely. However, the financial and economic crisis will constrain the actions of leaders of developed and developing nations alike.

Whatever the rate of progress in negotiations, the agenda will nevertheless continue to include the need for protection of existing forests and the establishment of new ones. It is my hope that interested parties and policy-makers will find insights in the book that contribute to appropriate roles being given to forestry in climate change policy.