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## 2 California environmental justice leaders resign from carbon offset task force

BY [DEBRA KAHN](#)

|02/11/2021 08:00 AM EST

SAN FRANCISCO — Two members of a state task force devoted to evaluating new types of carbon offsets for use in California's cap-and-trade system resigned this week, citing environmental justice concerns.

**What happened:** Brian Nowicki, California climate policy director for the Center for Biological Diversity, and Neil Tangri, science and policy director for the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, both resigned Monday from the California Air Resources Board's compliance offsets protocol task force.

The year-old task force was charged with examining new sources of carbon offsets, or greenhouse gas reductions that companies can buy in place of the state-issued allowances that are aimed at reducing emissions to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. It released its [draft report](#) Monday that includes recommendations to generate more offsets through new techniques, like adjusting cattle feed to reduce methane emissions, as well as expanding the use of offsets from forest preservation, destruction of ozone-depleting substances and other existing categories.

The resignations are the latest example of the schism between environmental justice and mainstream environmental advocates over market-based mechanisms to address climate change. Both Nowicki and Tangri said they thought the group should have focused on examining ways to reduce emissions in disadvantaged communities rather than increasing the supply of low-cost options to comply with the cap-and-trade program.

"This definitely is showing the tensions between visions of where we're going to go at this point," Nowicki said in an interview. "We've just spent 10 years with an operational AB 32, and the question is, are we going to take a step back and redirect and capture more benefits for some of the worst polluted air basins in the country and some of the poorest communities in the country, or are we going to continue moving forward chasing market mechanisms that we have very serious questions about how well they're actually performing?"

**Background:** While environmental justice groups have long opposed carbon trading because it allows emitters to buy greenhouse gas allowances instead of reducing carbon dioxide and accompanying conventional pollutants at facilities that are often located in disadvantaged communities, offsets are a particular flash point because they move any pollution reductions further afield. Environmental groups and economists have also questioned whether many of the reductions that come from offset projects would have occurred anyway without the ability to sell credits based on the projects, a core concept known as "additionality."

Lawmakers reauthorized the state's cap-and-trade program through 2030 in [CA AB398 \(17R\)](#). As part of negotiations with environmental justice advocates, they decreased the amount of offsets that could be used instead of regular allowances, and added a requirement that half of the offsets had to have "direct environmental benefits" within California. The bill also created the task force and directed it to come up with ways to increase the supply of offsets.

**Objections:** Tangri and [Nowicki said](#) in their resignation letters that the task force consisted mostly of members that have interests in expanding the use of offsets or that have ties to industries or organizations that would benefit from expanding the offset market.

The 13-member group includes a member of the Yurok Tribe, which generates forestry offsets from its land; employees of New Forests, American Forest Foundation and Pacific Forest Trust, all of which work on forestry offset projects; and two independent forestry offset consultants. Projects to reduce deforestation make up about 80 percent of the supply in California's offset market.

The report includes recommendations to reduce the risk for project developers by reducing the amount of time that offsets can be canceled for violations; to let emitters use CARB-approved offsets in other programs, including for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act; and to let emitters trade unused offset capacity so that they can buy more total offsets.

"Given the composition of the task force, its final report should be understood as a wish list by project developers rather than the result of a multistakeholder process," [Tangri wrote](#).

Tangri said he had been "optimistic" at the outset that the task force could be used to examine new opportunities for reducing emissions in disadvantaged communities, but that the rest of the group was focused on expanding offset supplies from existing project types.

"Fundamentally, this is a political problem that was outsourced to a technical committee," he said in an interview. "There's no technical solution to the fundamental political conflict."

**State response:** CARB said the point of the group was to evaluate new protocols and pointed out that Nowicki and Tangri were affiliated with groups that have long been skeptical of offsets.

"The two taskforce members who resigned represented two organizations/interests that have long standing concerns about the statutory direction to include a compliance offset program within the Cap-and-Trade Program," CARB spokesperson Dave Clegern said in an email. "In addition, some of their concern involved issues beyond the Task Force scope. Specifically, re-evaluating already approved protocols. The issues they raised on those earlier protocols have been fully litigated previously. The solicitation for task force application specifically states that it is to look at new protocols."

**What's next:** The task force will take public comments on the report through Feb. 23 and will hold its last meeting March 2. CARB will also kick off its new scoping plan later this year, a quinquennial process that will examine how large a role cap-and-trade should play in achieving the 2030 emissions target.