

Background

Regional Forest Agreements are a key part of national forest policy agreed by the Commonwealth, States and Territories in 1992 in the National Forest Policy Statement. The Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) for the Gippsland region will be one of five RFAs between Victoria and the Commonwealth.

The RFA will last for up to 20 years and aims to provide certainty for industry, conservation and local communities. It has three main objectives:

- to protect environmental values in a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve System based on nationally agreed criteria (the JANIS criteria);
- to encourage job creation and growth in forest-based industries, including wood products, tourism and minerals; and
- to manage all native forests in an ecologically sustainable way.

The JANIS criteria aim to reserve at least 15 per cent of each forest type as existed before European arrival, 60 per cent or more of old-growth forest and at least 90 per cent of high quality wilderness.

The criteria will be applied as far as practicable on public land, and will also take account of social and economic considerations.

Victorian RFA Regions

Victoria has five RFA regions:

- East Gippsland (RFA signed February 1997);
- Central Highlands (RFA signed March 1998);
- North East (RFA signed August 1999);
- Gippsland (RFA currently in preparation); and
- West (RFA currently in preparation).

Stages in the RFA Process

The RFA process has three stages - the Comprehensive Regional Assessment, the Directions Report and development of the final Agreement.

Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA).

The CRA provides the scientific information base for the RFA. The CRA projects for the Gippsland region assessed the range of forest uses and values, drawing on a wide range of

studies and research with input from regional stakeholder and community groups. The CRA Report provides an overview of the following assessments:

- biodiversity
- old-growth forest
- wilderness
- economic
- world heritage
- social
- resource
- national estate

The National Estate Assessment is continuing and will be the subject of a separate report.

RFA Directions Report

The next phase will be the production of a Directions Report building upon information contained in the CRA Report and the results of consultations with the community. It will:

- propose a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Gippsland addressing the national forest reserve criteria;
- consider the elements of ecologically sustainable forest management (ESFM) which are part of the RFA;
- identify industry development opportunities; and
- consider the links between the RFA process and other statutory processes, particularly environmental impact assessment, World Heritage, National Estate and endangered species.

RFA Finalisation

Following release and public consultation on the Directions Report, the Commonwealth and State Governments will negotiate the Regional Forest Agreement.

Consultation

Workshops will be held in the region to gain community and stakeholder feedback on the CRA report and input to the Directions Report. There will also be public workshops following release of the Directions Report. Commonwealth and Victorian officials will also meet interested members of the community and forest industries to discuss specific issues.

Contacts

Commonwealth:

Catharine Masters
Forests Taskforce, Department of the
Prime Minister and Cabinet
Phone: 02 6271 5077
Fax: 02 6271 5511

Victoria:

Andrew Maclean
Department of Natural Resources and
Environment.
Phone: 03 9637 8407
Fax: 03 9637 8116

All reports for the RFA are available on the Internet at <http://www.rfa.gov.au>

