

# **Victorian RFA Review – Submission Portland Field Naturalists' Club Inc 26-02-2010**

The following submission relates to the **West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement**.

The Portland Field Naturalists' Club (PFNC) has had a long association with conservation in far southwest Victoria with a rich history of advocacy. During the club's 65 years of existence members have been instrumental in a number of significant reservations including the Lower Glenelg National Park, Mt Richmond National Park, Cape Nelson State Park, Discovery Bay Coastal Park, Bats Ridge Wildlife Reserve, Nine Mile Reserve and more recently the Cobboboonee National/Forest Park.

Members of the PFNC actively engaged in the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement process and supplied extensive locational data relating to significant flora and fauna, as well as detailed submissions, public forums and the production of a video which explained the process and the forest values we wished to conserve.

Members of the PFNC also participated extensively in the Portland/Horsham Forest Management Plan process which followed the RFA culminating in a detailed submission entitled "A Zonal Reserve System for the Forests of the Portland Forest Management Area".

We also participated fully in the boundary determination process for the Cobboboonee National/Forest Park again providing a detailed submission.

The PFNC submits that the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement should now be formally cancelled due in no small part to the creation of the Otway National/Forest Parks, Cobboboonee National/Forest Parks and the altered Wombat Forest resource utilisation.

The effective removal of substantial areas from the original agreement in relation to commercial wood extraction makes the economic assumptions and wood volume estimates which the RFA was based on invalid and untenable.

It is also clear that a number of sawmills now no longer operate in the West Victoria RFA region. These operations were no doubt once considered to be integral to the very basis of the agreement itself.

PFNC members submit that there are also very powerful ecological reasons to cancel the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement.

In relation to the Portland/Horsham Forest Management Area there has been a massive historical loss of native vegetation since European settlement leaving a highly fragmented landscape with many areas of public land being virtual islands surrounded by a sea of cleared agricultural land.

A major restoration project known as Habitat 141 has begun which recognises the importance of vegetated public land and aims to reconnect forest and woodland areas from the 'outback to the ocean'. The scope of the project includes the majority of state forest areas originally covered by the RFA.

The project aims to reconnect areas of public land in strategic locations and increase native vegetation on private land to bring about a resilient and reconnected landscape to maximise the ability for biodiversity to be maintained during a time of unavoidable climatic change.

The PFNC submits that any commercial harvesting of timber from state forests within the Habitat 141 project vision has the potential to negate or degrade the anticipated outcomes of the project.

Members of the PFNC are well aware of the existence of a number of threatened fauna species that are listed either under the EPBC Act or the Victorian FFG Act within state forest areas within the Portland/Horsham Forest Management Areas these include:

Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isoodon obesulus*) - Endangered (EPBC)

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii graptogyne*) – Endangered (EPBC)

Long-nosed Potoroo (*Potorous tridactylus*) – Vulnerable (EPBC)

Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*) – Vulnerable (FFG)

Masked Owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae*) – Endangered (FFG)

Barking Owl (*Ninox connivens*) – Endangered (FFG)

Spot-tailed Quoll – (*Dasyurus maculates*) – Endangered (EPBC)

Swamp Antechinus (*Antechinus minimus*) – Near Threatened (FFG)

Swamp Skink (*Egernia coventryi*) – Vulnerable (FFG)

These species deserve the utmost protection from threatening processes such as commercial wood extraction.

In summary members of the PFNC submit that the West Victoria RFA be formally cancelled, that all Special Protection Zones and Special Management Zones created as part of the agreement continue to be recognised. We also submit that all forests and woodlands are to be managed with the conservation of biodiversity as the highest order priority pending a substantive re-evaluation of the status of these areas in a time of climate change.

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Portland Field Naturalists' Club Inc