

CRA Forest News

RFA newsletter of the Forests Taskforce,
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet;
Environment Australia and
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry - Australia

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RFAs, trade deficit top priorities for Tuckey

Overcoming Australia's \$1.5 billion deficit in forest products and completing the Regional Forest Agreement process are top priorities for the Minister appointed to the new portfolio of Forestry and Conservation, the Hon Wilson Tuckey MP.

Mr Tuckey has promised to maintain an open door policy which ensures that all interest groups can participate in the forest debate and contribute to RFA outcomes.

"The RFA process involves all interested groups, which is an approach we have to continue," Mr Tuckey said. "That is the best way to achieve a balanced result taking into account the wishes of the environmental movement, industry groups and a sustainable future."

Mr Tuckey said it was vital for the Commonwealth and States to maintain a joint approach to RFAs, using shared expertise in science, conservation and socio-economic data to develop the best outcomes.

"My own concern is twofold," he said. "Firstly, we should remember that the evolution of Australian forests has been substantially the result of human intervention over tens of thousands of years through the application of fire in indigenous hunting practices.

"The other point of concern is that we take a whole of forest approach to



forest management.

"Forest policy should be based on science - not on the practice of literally drawing a square on a map and saying one side of the fence is no go and the other is 'go for your life'.

"Then in the parks or reserves, there's the issue of feral animals and exotic weeds. If you are going to lock away areas they've simply got to be properly managed."

Under the new Commonwealth administrative arrangements, Mr Tuckey is junior Minister to the Hon. Mark Vaile MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Mr Tuckey has responsibility for all forest policy administered by the portfolio, including implementation of the National Forest Policy

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**Creating jobs,
Protecting forests**

The information in this newsletter reports progress on completing RFAs and other relevant forest issues. It does not represent the views of the Commonwealth or State governments.

Commonwealth

Minister for Forestry and Conservation

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Statement and the RFA process, industry development, Plantations 2020 Vision, farm forestry, and international forestry.

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Robert Hill, maintains his previous role in the RFA process and is responsible for international conservation issues.

As the member for O'Connor for 18 years and with 16 years in local government before that, Mr Tuckey has a breadth of experience in issues affecting regional Australians, including land management and natural resources.

O'Connor is Western Australia's second-largest electorate after Kalgoorlie, stretching from Hopetown on the South Coast to Geraldton on the north-west coast. It covers an area of 186,000 square kilometres and nearly half the State's local authorities.

Mr Tuckey was born in Perth in 1935. The son of a motor mechanic, he was educated at Perth Modern School. At 18 he became a house painter, then moved to retail grocery and the hotel industry. In 1958 he moved to Carnarvon and extended his business activities into tourism, transport, earthmoving and data processing.

Mr Tuckey is married to Jenny, and has three children, Michael, Sue and Judith, and three grandchildren Sarah, Andrew and Ellen.

In October 1980, Mr Tuckey was elected to Federal Parliament as the inaugural Member for O'Connor and re-elected at all subsequent elections.

Between 1984 and 1996, he held Shadow Ministerial portfolios including Small Business; Administrative Services;

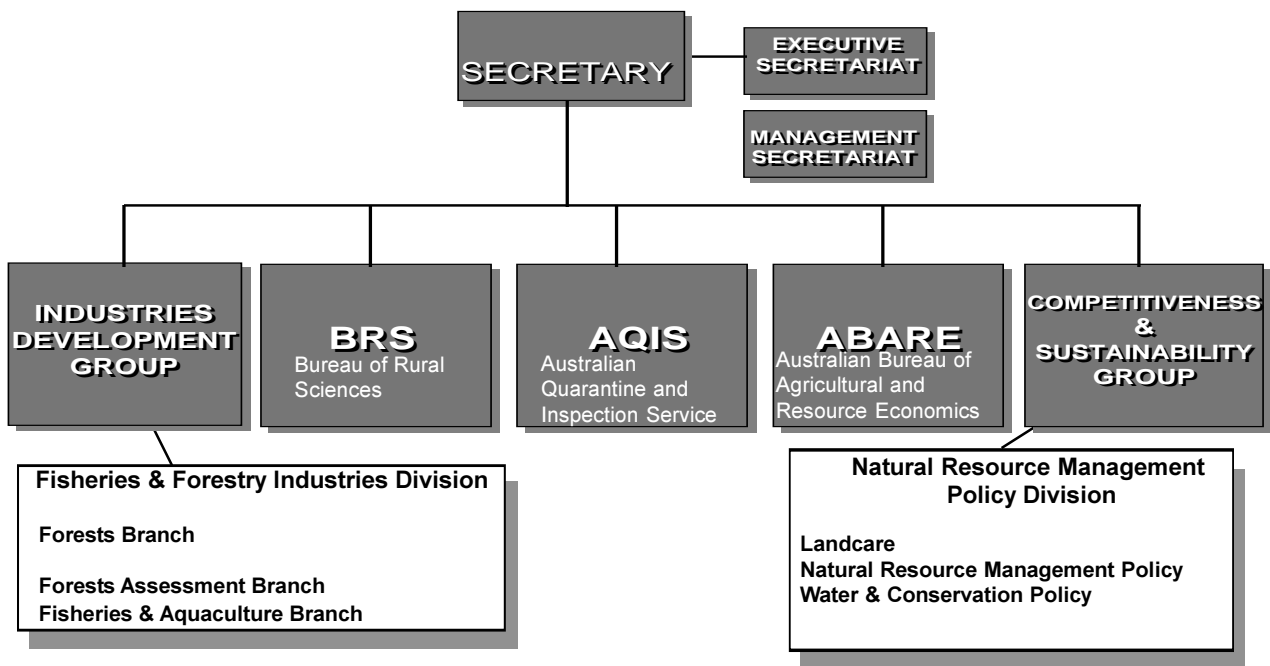
Housing; Health and ID Card; Employment and Training; Deputy Leader of Opposition Business; Veterans' Affairs and Defence Science and Personnel.

In February 1997, he was elected Chairman of the Aboriginal Affairs, Government Members Policy Committee which has taken a high profile on Native Title and other key Aboriginal issues.

In October 1997, he was elected Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, which is charged with approving expenditure on all public work, and was appointed to the Government's Tax Consultative Task Force.

Mr Tuckey's other interests include racehorse breeding and training. He has chaired the WA Turf Club and remains a member of the committee.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY - AUSTRALIA NEW STRUCTURE



Commonwealth

State of the Forests Report

A valuable reference for anyone interested in Australia's forests is now available in the form of the Bureau of Rural Science's *Australia's State of the Forests Report, 1998*.

The first national scientific report to the public on Australia's forests, it is the result of more than four and a half years' work by the National Forest Inventory (NFI) and Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies to gather, collate and standardise statistics and information on Australian forests.

Launched at Parliament House this month by Minister Tuckey, the report describes the broad characteristics of Australia's forests, their location, extent and ownership, their status and the range of uses to which they are put.

Facts highlighted in *Australia's State of the Forests Report 1998* include:

- only about 1.5 per cent of Australia's available multiple use forest is harvested for timber in any one year;
- In 186 Australian towns forest-related industries employ at least five per cent of the working population, with 35 towns having 20 per cent or more of the workforce employed in forest industries;
- Australian forests are estimated to store 13.1 billion tonnes of carbon;
- about 11 per cent of Australian forests are in conservation reserves, including 23 per cent of our rainforests, 19 per cent of our open forests, and 8 per cent of our woodlands;
- about 8.5 per cent is public land under multiple use management, which includes forest harvesting;
- more than 66 per cent of the plantation estate is publicly owned; and
- nearly 75 per cent of all plants and nearly 50 per cent of all vertebrate animals known in Australia, have been recorded in forests.

The report adopts a definition of forests which aligns closely with international practice, and includes areas commonly referred to as 'woodlands', 'open forests' and 'closed forests'.

Under this definition, Australia has about 156 million hectares of native forest and woodlands, and over one million hectares of plantations, of which about 86 per cent are exotic pines and 14 per cent are natives, mostly eucalypts.

Copies of the report are available for \$40 from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry - Australia Shopfront. Phone (02) 6272 5550.

RFA Bill returns to Parliament

The *Regional Forest Agreements Bill 1998* was reintroduced to the House of Representatives on November 26 and is expected to be debated when Parliament resumes next year.

The Bill's key objectives are:

- providing legislative backing for RFAs and the comprehensive processes that lead up to them, so that all Australians can have confidence in the future of our forests;
- ensuring that any future decisions about the conduct of approved forestry operations within an RFA region are not subject to Federal statutory requirements that were satisfied under the RFA process;
- strengthening RFAs' termination and compensation provisions to maximise the certainty to be provided to all stakeholders by the RFA; and
- ensuring that Federal export controls cannot be used to prevent the export of wood sourced from an RFA region.

The Regional Forest Agreement Bill 1998 can be read on the internet at <http://www.apf.gov.au/>

Victoria

North East RFA on track

Directions Report

The New Year will see a Directions Report for North East Victoria, following constructive input by stakeholders to the Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA).

Two rounds of public meetings were well attended in Corryong, Mansfield and Myrtleford in September and October following the August release of the CRA Overview Report.

Issues discussed included the protection of environmental values on the Stanley Plateau and in the Wongungarra, and the need to maintain current licence volumes for industry.

A final round of public meetings will be held during the formal public comment period on the Directions Report.

Work will then begin on a final RFA, which is expected to be finalised during the first half of 1999.

Biodiversity and old growth

Environmental projects for the assessment identified the great diversity of the region.

The flora and fauna projects identified about 2000 species of vascular (higher order) plants, including 166 of conservation significance.

Thirty four species of mammals, reptiles, birds and frogs were identified as rare or threatened,

including the Long-footed Potoroo and the Spotted Tree Frog.

While the populations of many of the species studied have decreased in the past 10 years, some, including those of the Mountain Pygmy-possum, the Barking Owl, Powerful Owl and Glossy Black-Cockatoo, are thought to have stabilised.

About 21 per cent of the region's forested public land was identified as old-growth, found in both the taller wet forests and some of the drier, more open forest types.

\$14m contribution to local economy by sawmillers

Economic and social projects estimated the value of commercial forestry, sawmilling and residual log-processing industries using hardwood from the region at about \$20.6 million, providing 212 jobs.

Looking at the flow-on effects in the region, timber processing and contracting industries using hardwood from the North East were found to directly support 1,336 people. This figures includes both sawmill employees and their families.

These employees make a significant contribution to the local and regional economy, with at least \$14 million generated each year in household expenditure.

The North-East is part of the 'Legends, Wine and High

Country' tourism region. Tourism makes a major contribution to the region, directly employing more than 5,400 people. Taking into account its contribution to the retail and wholesale industries, these industries combined are the region's second-largest employer, providing about 11,500 jobs in 1995-96, or 17.7 per cent of the total workforce.

About 360,000 people are estimated to have visited State forests in 1994-95. This contributed up to \$18m to the regional economy.

The social assessment of the region and its population of 174,000 found that agriculture and forestry continue to make a significant contribution to the regional economy, together accounting for nearly 10 per cent of its industries.

A telephone survey of 1100 residents, along with other information collected for the assessment shows that as well as valuing their forests highly and displaying a keen interest in their management and use, the people in the North East support the need to balance a wide range of competing uses and values.

Gippsland CRA report nears completion

The many stakeholder and community groups who contributed to assessment projects for the Gippsland region can expect to see the fruits of their labour in the first few months of 1999.

Victoria

West Victoria - State's fifth RFA under way

The Comprehensive Regional Assessment process has kicked off in the West region of Victoria.

Community heritage workshops for the National Estate assessment were held in Avoca, Daylesford and Rushworth Heywood, Hamilton, Camperdown and Apollo Bay in November. Good attendances - more than 40 people participated in the Daylesford workshop alone - reflected a high level of interest in the region's forests.

Commonwealth and State officers are planning to hold general public meetings in the West as soon as is practical in 1999, to explain the overall RFA process in the region and how it will involve local communities.

The West is a large and very diverse region, stretching south from the Hume Highway and west to the South Australian border.

As well as nominating places of special significance to the community, workshop participants raised a range of general issues - many of which will be addressed in other CRA projects, or in the more general RFA consultations.



Heywood workshop facilitator Krystal Buckley at work with participant Steve Holmes

Concerns included the future of the Box Ironbark forest, the local waterways, conservation of habitat, and the management of the Cobbobonee Forest, the Red Gums and Stony Ridges.

Other participants, such as apiarists, were concerned that small industries had continued access to the forests.

Tasmania

State Bill gives full effect to Tasmanian RFA

Tasmania's RFA legislation passed through both houses of State Parliament this month, just over a year after the Agreement was signed by Mr Howard and the then Premier, Mr Rundle.

The State legislation gives full statutory effect to the RFA, which has already seen significant jobs growth and increased investment in Tasmanian forest industries.

The Tasmanian Minister for

Infrastructure, Energy and Resources, Paul Lennon, announced that the bill includes the allocation of Deferred Forest Land between reservation and multiple use for forest production, the creation of 88 new or enlarged forest reserves, an agreed set of objectives to be used for the management of forest reserves and a statutory commitment to the annual supply of a minimum amount of high

quality saw and veneer logs

Amendments to the Bill protected existing exploration licences and formalise consultation procedures between the Minister for Infrastructure, Energy and Resources and the Environment Minister on the approval of management plans for areas of land with a reserve status on which mining is allowed.

News South Wales

Negotiations continue on NSW RFAs

Minister Tuckey has reaffirmed the Commonwealth's commitment to pursuing Regional Forest Agreements with the State government in NSW.

Negotiations are continuing between government on the shape of RFAs for NSW with the Eden region being the highest priority for completion. A complicating factor has been the recent passage through the NSW Parliament of the Forestry and National Parks Estate Bill 1998. Preparation for this required a considerable effort by NSW officials which effectively halted progress towards the RFAs.

Mr Tuckey has urged NSW to return to the negotiating table and pursue an open and transparent joint process based on consultation and good science and said that \$40million in Commonwealth funding for the Forest Industry Structural Adjustment Package will be available to NSW when final agreements are reached.

Social data returned to communities

Meanwhile, community stakeholders in northern NSW have been invited to comment on information collected for the social assessments of the Upper North East region.

Mr Tuckey thanked the many community representatives, local businesses and service providers who contributed to the assessment's surveys, workshops and case studies. "Local knowledge was central to this

work," he said. "People gave generously of their time and expertise to ensure that the assessment reflected community concerns.

"It is important that governments acknowledge this contribution by returning the information to the community. It will be useful not only in reaching agreement between the Commonwealth and NSW on a Regional Forest Agreement, but to all planners and policy makers with an interest in land use management in the region."

Covering 17 local government areas, the Upper North East region has a population growing at twice the State rate, and high unemployment at 15.38%. The timber industry is a major employer of nearly 2,000 people in the region.

Work for the Social Assessment projects included:

- a community attitudes survey, which found strong support for both use of Australian timber and conservation values;
- surveys of forest-related occupational communities, including timber workers, tourism operators and other forest users like beekeepers and graziers;
- case studies of Byron Bay, Casino, Coffs Harbour, Coultts Crossing, Dorrigo, Grafton, Guyra, Lismore, Pottsville, Rappville, Tenterfield, and Woodenbong.

Assessment phase continues in Southern region

Assessments are in full swing in the Southern region, with basic data layers expected to be finalised by February.

The CRAFTI project now under way - Aerial Photographic Interpretation (API) mapping of structural and floristic attributes - will allow delineation of old growth forest and forest ecosystems of the region. Modelling work to determine the pre-1750 extent of forest ecosystems will follow.

The timber inventory and flora field work is almost complete and fauna surveys will be completed following field work this summer.

Among the many issues to be considered in the social assessment will be the impact of the new pulp mill at Tumut. The Minister for Industry, Senator Minchin, announced earlier this month that \$40 million would be invested in the project from the Commonwealth's Investing for Growth program.

The new mill is expected to create opportunities for a further 30,000 hectares of plantation and the creation of about 1,000 jobs.

The Southern Regional Forest Forum, chaired by Professor Peter Kanowski, met in early December and will reconvene in Canberra at the end of January to discuss how communities can best be involved in the next phase of the RFA. The agreement is expected to be finalised in the second half of '99.

Queensland

Western Australia

New faces in SEQ team

The end of the year has seen changes in the South East Queensland RFA team, both in State and Commonwealth government departments. Robyn Bromley has returned to Environment Australia, and her role as Queensland RFA Project Manager at the Forests Taskforce at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has been filled by **Anne McDermott**, who joined the Taskforce in May 1998 to work on RFA legislation and other issues affecting more than one RFA region.

Community Coordinator

The region also has a new Community Coordinator. After more than 12 months work gathering data and completing community profiles for the region's social assessment Bronwyn Burke left the Commonwealth in October to take up a State Government position.

Jude Abbs was the successful applicant for the job, and hopes soon to be a familiar face around the region. A social scientist and organisational psychologist of more than 30 years experience, Jude has worked extensively on policy development, social planning, group facilitation and research. Much of her work has been with rural residents and Aboriginal communities.

Jude was born and bred in the northern Queensland town of Richmond and has had a long and committed association with regional issues. She is hoping to hit the road soon to meet many of the people who have already contributed their time and expertise to social assessment projects for the RFA, and will be involved in any future social impact analysis.

In the Queensland Department of Natural Resources, **Malcolm Taylor** has succeeded Alf Said.

At the time of printing, the CRA Overview Report for South East Queensland was being finalised and governments were reviewing the timetable for milestones in 1999.

IFMA extended

The current Commonwealth-State Interim Forest Management Arrangements (IFMA) - the equivalent of Deferred or Interim Forest Agreements in other States - end on December 31. These arrangements are designed to prevent the foreclosure of options for a comprehensive, adequate and representative system pending finalisation of an RFA, while maintaining wood supply to industry.

An IFMA taskforce has met and finalised recommendations to the Commonwealth and Queensland governments for a further extension of these arrangements to the end of June 1999.

Agreement draws closer in WA

Western Australia and the Commonwealth are in the final stages of negotiating the RFA for the South-West of Western Australia, with an Agreement expected by February next year.

Meanwhile officials are compiling an analysis of the many issues raised in the 30,000 public submissions received during the public comment period.

The analysis will be published on completion of the RFA, and will reflect the full range of issues raised by stakeholders and members of the public.

CRA Forest News

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If we don't hear from you, we'll keep you posted in 1999!

Forests Taskforce

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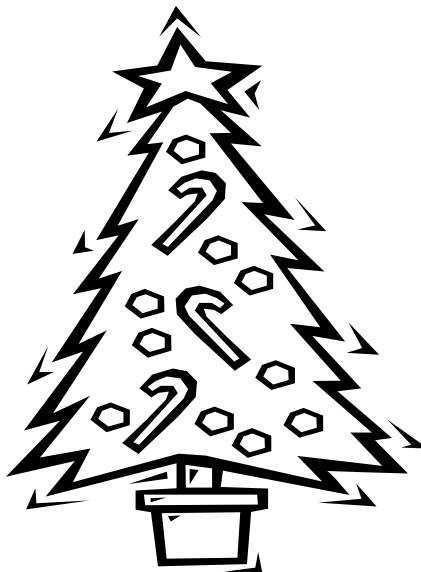
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Season's Greetings
