



# A regional forest agreement for North East NSW





# what is an RFA?

The Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) for the North East regions of NSW is one of a series of agreements being developed between the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments on the future use and management of the State's native forests.

It will be for 20 years, subject to five-yearly reviews, and will aim to provide certainty for forest-based industries, conservation and the community. The RFA has three main objectives:

- to protect environmental values in a world class Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve system of national parks and reserves;
- to encourage development in an internationally competitive timber industry; and
- to manage native forests in an ecologically sustainable way.

The Agreement will be based on the scientific comprehensive regional assessment of the social, economic, environmental and cultural heritage values of the region's native forests. The assessment included more than 60 technical projects, undertaken over three years with the participation of key forest stakeholders. The regional community contributed local knowledge and expertise through their participation in projects and through the community-based Upper and Lower North East Regional Forest Forums.

There will be one Regional Forest Agreement for North East NSW which will cover both the Upper North East (UNE) and Lower North East (LNE) forest regions.

## the regions

The Upper and Lower North East RFA regions cover nearly 10 million hectares (four million in UNE and 5.8 million in LNE), from the Queensland border to the edge of the Sydney basin.

About a third of the total area of the two regions is forested public lands. About two thirds (6 314 922 hectares) is private land, though not all of this is forested.

National parks (1 957 715 ha), State forest (1 025 572 ha) and Crown reserves managed by NPWS (2451 ha) currently total 3 million hectares.

Total employment across the Upper and Lower North East is approximately 481 000 people. The main employers are agriculture, forestry and fisheries; coal mining and metal manufacturing; food manufacturing; wholesale and retail trade; motels and other places of tourist accommodation; cafes, restaurants and other food outlets; education and health and public utilities. Forest-related industries generate 4.5% of regional income for the UNE and 1.7% for the LNE.

## the timber industry

The UNE and LNE regions together produce about 80 per cent of the State's hardwood production and 25 per cent of pulp logs. The gross value of direct output by the regions' hardwood timber industry in 1997/98 was \$256 million per annum (UNE \$138m and LNE \$118m).

The certainty provided by the RFA will encourage investment in new technologies and promote value-adding initiatives to make better and more efficient use of the timber resource.

In 1997/98 113 hardwood mills sourced logs from the State forests of the North East, 40 located in the Upper North East and 73 in the Lower North East. More than 150 other mills source their timber from private land.

The hardwood timber industry in the regions directly employed 2946 people in 1997/98 (UNE 1325 and LNE 1621) – 303 in forestry management, 365 in logging and haulage and 1849 in milling (both sawmill and pulpwood). The hardwood timber industry indirectly employed another 2 260 people.

A study for the comprehensive regional assessments estimated that in 1997/98 the native forest industry generated household income of about \$124 million each year.

### wood supply

Wood supply contracts (20 years) from State Forests to the timber industry currently provide 129 000 cubic metres per

annum of quota quality sawlog in the Upper and 140 000 per annum cubic metres of quota quality sawlog in the Lower North East. Of the 129 000 cubic metres supplied to the UNE, 20 000 cubic metres per annum will be allocated from the LNE (bringing the total quota quality sawlogs sourced from the LNE to 160 000 cubic metres per annum).

Supply levels have been established for the next twenty years. In the longer term, a greater contribution of resource supply from plantations can be expected. Opportunities to increase the longer term resource supply will be developed as part of a long term sustainability strategy in conjunction with the finalisation of the RFA.

### government assistance to the timber industry

The RFA may assist industry development by enhancing the availability of timber through private property resource supplementation by NSW; the purchase of land; the establishment of plantations; and through the enhanced certainty of resource supply. Further, the Commonwealth and State Governments are reviewing the joint Forest Industries Structural Adjustment Program (FISAP) which may provide assistance for industry expansion and value-adding initiatives.





Forester at work.

PHOTOGRAPH: State Forests of NSW



Timber from the region is used extensively in the building industry.

PHOTOGRAPH: NSW Forest Products Association

## tourism

Tourism is significant to the regions' economy, generating expenditure of between \$919 million and \$1795 million in the region each year and growing at an annual rate of between two and three per cent. There are more than two million visits each year to the national parks and State forests of the North East. As well as significant direct employment in forest-based tourism, the industry contributes to employment in the retail sector, accommodation and restaurants.

## other forest industries

Other industries operating in the forests include mining (particularly in the Lower North East), grazing, beekeeping, firewood and seed collecting. Assessments of these industries have identified their contribution to regional communities and the economy and consider the potential impacts of change in forest tenure.

## people and communities

Approximately 1.3 million people live in the North East region – 328 345 in the UNE and 989 201 in the LNE (including Newcastle and Gosford).

The Social Assessment for the RFA included surveys, workshops, data analysis and interviews to provide a snapshot of how the people and communities of the region use and value their forests.

Case studies of 12 communities in the UNE and 11 in the LNE found that Coffs Harbour, Grafton, Woodenbong and Dorrigo in the UNE region, and Walcha and Bulahdelah in the LNE region have relatively high concentrations of people employed in the native hardwood timber industry.

The assessment found that some communities are changing. For example Coffs Harbour, which used to be highly dependent on the timber industry, is expanding as a national and international tourist destination. Bellingen is another example of a community which has moved away from a predominantly timber and farming base to include alternative industries such as ecotourism. Recent timber industry investment in Kempsey has boosted employment and community vitality.



Commercial tourist operators provide rafting tours on the Nymboida River.

PHOTOGRAPH: Tourism NSW

## the car reserve system

The RFA will establish a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve system that is derived from nationally agreed criteria for the protection of forest biodiversity, old-growth and wilderness values.

The criteria aim to reserve:

- 15 per cent of the estimated extent of each forest ecosystem prior to European arrival;
- at least 60 per cent of old-growth forest; and
- 90 per cent or more of high quality wilderness.

Other criteria deal with representativeness, rare species, geographic variation and other factors important for long term conservation. The CAR reserve system will include:

- Dedicated reserves (national parks, nature reserves, flora reserves);
- Informal reserves on State Forests (such as forest management zones) and crown lands;
- Forest management prescriptions under NSW Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals.

With many forest ecosystems occurring on private land, the CAR Reserve system is likely to be complemented by voluntary conservation measures on private forests.

### ecosystems

Assessments identified 162 forest ecosystems in the UNE and 199 in the LNE.

All forest ecosystems are represented in the reserve system of North East NSW. For the UNE, at present 57 ecosystems

fully meet the nationally agreed target for reservation. Targets are substantially met for many other ecosystems. Overall, 16 per cent of the estimated pre-1750 ecosystem distribution is in reserves. For the LNE, at present 82 ecosystems fully meet target. Targets are substantially met for many other ecosystems. Overall, 22 per cent of the estimated pre-1750 ecosystem distribution is in reserves. Additional protection will occur through State Forests zoning and management prescriptions as part of the RFA.

### old-growth

One hundred and forty four forest ecosystems in the UNE and 172 in the LNE have an old growth component. Forty one per cent of the 654 600 hectares of old growth in the Upper North East and 79 per cent of the 879 600 hectares of old growth in the Lower North East is in national parks and crown reserves. Additional protection will occur through State Forests zoning and management prescriptions as part of the RFA.

### threatened species

More than 109 threatened and/or forest dependent plants and 144 animals were assessed in the Upper North East and Lower North East. Animals include the barking owl, masked owl, southern barred frog, squirrel glider and yellow bellied glider. Plants include the hairy quandong (UNE) and a rare green hood orchid, which was found in the Lower North East.



## world heritage

The regions contain most of the Central Eastern Rainforest World Heritage Area. Australian rainforests are an outstanding example of ecosystems unique in the world.

## wilderness

High quality wilderness was measured according to the nationally agreed criteria. By these criteria, 59 per cent of high quality wilderness in the Upper North East and 84 per cent in the Lower North East is within dedicated reserves.

Wilderness assessments under the NSW Wilderness Act will be completed by 1 January 2000. However, of the areas likely to be identified by this process, 53 per cent in the UNE and 82 per cent in the LNE is within dedicated reserves.

## natural & cultural heritage

Forestry, mining, pastoral and other activities have left their mark on the forest landscape with sawmills, sleeper cutter sites, gold mines and bullock tracks. The region also has many places of natural heritage. Assessments identified sites in the UNE and LNE that are of particular significance to regional communities, including the Bird Tree, McGrath's Hump, Platypus Flat and World War II TankTraps on the Brisbane Line and the Trestle Bridge from a 1930s logging railway in Wang Wark State Forest. Studies also identified places such as Barrington Tops, Dingo Tops, the Dorrigo plateau and the Richmond Range as important sites of natural heritage.





The Trestle Bridge in Wang Wark State Forest, evidence of logging in the 1930s, is among sites identified as significant to community heritage.

PHOTOGRAPH: Cameron Slatyer



Furniture is one of the region's value-added timber products. This stool is made from Sydney blue gum.

PHOTOGRAPH: Michael Ryan

## indigenous interests

Forested landscapes contain much evidence of Aboriginal use of and spiritual link to the land, which can be protected through:

- The protection of Aboriginal sites and artefacts.
- The maintenance of natural forest values

The RFA will address current management practices in relation to Indigenous interests. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and State Forests of NSW are reviewing Indigenous cultural heritage management in consultation with Aboriginal communities, aiming to develop systems that better consider the landscape context of sites and that provide for efficient protection and greater involvement of Aboriginal communities in decision making.

## managing the forests

The RFA will establish how our forests will be managed and protected for the future, whether they are in national parks and reserves or in State forests used for timber production or other uses. For example, NSW Government agencies including the National Parks and Wildlife Service and State Forests of NSW are developing strategies for ecologically sustainable forest management (ESFM).

These include:

- Forest Agreements outlining overall management approaches;
- Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals which determine the management of State forest areas of the CAR reserve system;
- Environmental Management Systems for State forests and National Parks;
- Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management Plans for State Forests;
- Codes of Forest Practice;
- Cultural Heritage Management Guidelines.

These systems and processes will address activities such as timber harvesting, fire prevention and detection, feral animal and noxious weed control.

## what happens now?

Your views are invited on issues you consider should be addressed in the RFA.

You can send written submissions to:

Resource and Conservation Division  
Dept of Urban Affairs and Planning  
GPO Box 3927  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Submissions close on 1 October 1999. This will allow the State and Commonwealth Governments to take your views into account before finalising the RFA by the end of October 1999.

### where can I find more information?

Details on projects undertaken for the two regions are contained in a Project Summaries booklet available from State Forests or National Parks offices in the region. Other RFA background material can be viewed on the Internet at <http://www.rfa.gov.au>.

If you have any further queries please contact:

#### Forests Taskforce

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Phone: 1800 650 983  
Fax: 02 6271 5511

#### Resource and Conservation Division

Dept of Urban Affairs and Planning  
Phone: 02 9228 3166  
Fax: 02 9228 4967



NSW GOVERNMENT



COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT



Regional Forest Agreements