



Environment and heritage

The Southern Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) covers an area of 4,513,000 hectares, incorporating areas on the South Coast of NSW and west almost to Albury. For the purposes of the Comprehensive Regional Assessment, on which the RFA is based, two sub-regions were assessed – South Coast and Tumut. (Assessments undertaken for a third sub-region, Northern, once finalised, will be used by NSW in a process designed to achieve similar levels of certainty for industry and the environment.)

About 45 per cent of the RFA region is public land, of which about 80 per cent is forested. The remaining 55 per cent is private land, about 30 per cent of which is forested. Overall, nearly 55 per cent of the region is forested.

The CAR reserve system

The RFA establishes a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve System that is based on nationally agreed criteria for the protection of forest biodiversity, old-growth and wilderness values.* The CAR Reserve System includes:

- **Dedicated reserves (national parks, nature reserves, flora reserves);**
- **Informal reserves on State forests (as special forest management zones), Crown lands and State recreation areas; and**
- **Parts of the public forest managed by prescriptions under Integrated Forestry Operations Approvals.**

The CAR Reserve system in the Southern region covers more than 1.4 million hectares. This is about 31 per cent of the RFA region and 75 per cent of its public land. It includes 1.325 million hectares in dedicated reserves, 64,700 hectares in informal reserves and 32,500 hectares covered by prescriptions.

Forest ecosystems

Of the 159 forest ecosystems identified in the Southern region, 87 (55 per cent) have had their JANIS targets met within the CAR Reserve System. Forest management prescriptions on State forest will provide considerable additional protection to rare non-commercial forest ecosystems, rainforest and non-forest ecosystems (e.g. grassland, wetland, heath). Thirty four ecosystems have been identified as priorities for voluntary conservation on private land.

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- The JANIS criteria are the 'Nationally Agreed Criteria for the Establishment of a Comprehensive Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Forests in Australia', aiming to protect: 15 per cent of each forest type as existed before European arrival, or higher targets for where forest types are vulnerable rare or endangered; at least 60 per cent of old growth forest or all remaining occurrences of old growth forest ecosystems that are rare or depleted; and 90 per cent or more of high quality wilderness. 'JANIS' stands for the Joint ANZECC/MCFFA National Forest Policy Statement Implementation Subcommittee, which developed the criteria.

Old Growth

One hundred and eight forest ecosystems in the Southern region have components that are in old-growth condition. Seventy five per cent of the 753,400 hectares of old growth in the Southern region is in the CAR Reserve System. Additional protection for high conservation value old growth forest ecosystems will be provided under the Integrated Forest Operations Approval for the Southern region.

Wilderness

In the Southern RFA, 93.2 per cent of wilderness as defined in the JANIS Reserve Criteria, is protected within dedicated reserves. More than half the remaining wilderness outside dedicated reserves is on freehold or leasehold land.

Threatened species and forest communities

More than 165 threatened or regionally significant forest-dependent plant species and 69 animal species were assessed in the Southern region. Animals included the Heath Monitor, Giant Burrowing Frog, Greater Glider, Sooty Owl, Brown Treecreeper and the Tiger Quoll. Plants included the Wee Jasper Grevillea, Phantom Wattle, Araluen Gum, Nowra Heath Myrtle and the Illawarra Greenhood.

Under the RFA, these species and others will be protected within the reserve system and through management prescriptions. Priorities for developing Recovery Plans for threatened forest-dependent flora and fauna are provided in Attachment 3 of the RFA.

National estate

The RFA has added to our knowledge of the region's national estate values and improves its protection and management through a combination of reservation (dedicated and informal) and management prescriptions off reserve. See Attachment 4 of the RFA.

World heritage

Both governments agree that any further world heritage nominations will come from within the CAR Reserve System.

European and natural heritage

The RFA has greatly improved our knowledge of forest places with historic, social or aesthetic values. Forestry, mining, pastoralism and other activities have left their mark on the landscape with sawmills, sleeper cutter sites, gold mines and bullock tracks. Sites in the Southern region of particular significance to regional communities include the Kiandra Area, Kiandra Court House/Chalet, the Hume and Hovell Walking Track, Mt Dromedary (including the gold mining sites) and Wog Wog Track and Yards. The reservation of all or significant portions of the Budawang Range, Hawkesbury Sandstone areas, Kioloa and Tallaganda State Forests, and the expanded link between Kosciusko National Park to Namadgi National Park, increase the number of significant sites of natural heritage in the region.

Statewide Guidelines for the Management of Cultural Heritage Values and Places consistent with national and international guidelines have been developed. These will be the framework for management, identification and protection of cultural values.

Aboriginal heritage

The RFA contains a package of measures for implementation by NSW to ensure the appropriate management of Aboriginal heritage, including the maintenance of traditional uses and values. It is recognised that such heritage is not confined to archaeological sites and artefacts but may include natural values such as flora, fauna and landforms.

These measures include a commitment to develop joint management arrangements which consider Aboriginal culture and values and enable Aboriginal people to gain access to, and use of, land for traditional, cultural and socio-economic purposes.

Aboriginal ownership

The RFA is not intended to influence either current or future Native Title claims in any way. Under specific State legislations, the NSW Government has provided for Aboriginal people to own lands of cultural significance.