

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE RFA PROCESS

National Forest Policy

Australia's National Forest Policy sets out broad conservation and industry goals for the management of Australia's forests agreed between Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

To implement this national policy, governments have opted for an approach which:

- provides interim protection to forest areas which may be required for a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) forest reserve system
- undertakes Comprehensive Regional Assessments (CRAs) of environmental, heritage, economic and social values of forests
- negotiates Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) between the Commonwealth and State Governments about the long term management and use of forests in a particular region.

Scoping Agreement

In January 1997, the Queensland and the Commonwealth Governments signed a Scoping Agreement for the South-East Queensland region. This agreement committed both governments to the establishment of procedures and processes for developing an RFA.

The Scoping Agreement for the RFA states:

The Commonwealth and Queensland Governments believe that the long term ecologically sustainable management of forests, and the development of competitive and efficient forest industries are compatible objectives and that there may be opportunities for other industries within forest areas and are, therefore, committed to providing a basis for these objectives in the regions covered by this Agreement, thereby ensuring the protection of conservation values, the basis for an internationally competitive forest products industry, and the effective use of other economic and social resources of the region.

Community representation in the CRA has been primarily managed through a forum known as the Forest Reference Panel which is represented at all levels of the RFA process. The panel includes representative stakeholders such as the Queensland Timber Board, Cattlemen's Union, United Graziers' Association, Queensland Conservation Council, Australian Rainforest Conservation Society, Forest Protection Society, Wilderness Society, Queensland Beekeepers' Association, Queensland Mining Council, Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action, Gurang Land Council, Goolburri Aboriginal Land Council, Local Government Association of Queensland, and State and Commonwealth Government departments.

This document represents a summary of reports stemming from the CRA process, reflecting the economic, social, environmental and heritage values of the forests in the South-East Queensland region.

The next stage of the RFA process, where all CRA data is integrated, will provide governments with the information required to develop an option, or a number of options, concerning long term use and sustainable management of the region's forests. This will culminate in the preparation of an RFA options report, which will be released for public comment through a range of mechanisms, including public workshops.

Following consideration of comments received from the public and community groups, the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments will commence final negotiations, leading to the signing of the RFA. This is expected to occur in the first half of 1999.

For further information on the RFA process, access the Commonwealth web site at <http://www.rfa.gov.au>.