

Jobs and Forest Based Industries

The forests of the Central Highlands make a major contribution to employment and economic growth in forest based industries including wood and wood products, tourism and mining. The enhanced certainty provided by the Central Highlands RFA will encourage forest based industries to expand, develop exports and provide opportunities for employment growth.

Wood and Paper products industries

Hardwood from the Central Highlands accounts for a third of Victoria's total sawlog production and 57 per cent of its total pulplog production. The region contributed nearly half the total log royalties received by the Victorian Government in 1995-96.

With 41 sawmills and four major domestic pulpwood processors receiving hardwood from the region, it supports more than 1500 direct jobs, including jobs associated with forest management, pulp and paper manufacturing, sawmilling and logging and haulage. Ninety percent of the pulpwood produced from the Central Highlands is processed domestically.

In total, the wood based industries receiving hardwood resources from the Central Highlands contribute 3830 direct and indirect jobs, and \$731 million in State output across the Victorian economy.

The Central Highlands RFA gives the forest products industry:

- twenty years' security;
- the increased certainty it needs to plan ahead;
- removal of the requirement for woodchip export licences;
- a commitment by the Victorian Government to supply at least the current licensed volume of D+ sawlogs (345,000 cubic metres per annum) for the next 20 years from the Dandenong, Central and Central Gippsland Forest Management Areas;

Tourism and Recreation

Tourism is an important part of the regional economy, with international and Australian visitors spending about \$97 million in the region in 1995, and almost three million people visiting the region's National and State parks and forests. The Dandenong Ranges National Park has the third highest visitation rate of all national parks in the State. Outdoor education is also an important forest based industry in the Central Highlands. At least eight outdoor education organisations and eight schools have outdoor facilities in the region, the Alexandra-Eildon area being a focal point. These organisations employ about 200 people catering for approximately 10,000 people each year.

The RFA provides:

- a world class reserve system;
- sustainably managed forests recognising major tourism attractions close to Melbourne; and
- certainty for the industry to plan ahead.

Minerals

The region is an important supplier of construction materials and other industrial mineral commodities, has a long history of mining and contains a number of known and potential mineral deposits. There are 41 operating quarries in the region supplying a wide range of industrial, construction and agricultural uses. The Central Highlands is part of a major gold province, and is prospective for a number of deposit types including high potential for slate-belt gold and some construction materials over most of the region.

Under the RFA:

- Certainty of access through the identification of defined land tenures will give industry confidence to invest in new mineral exploration and mining.
- New exploration and mining will not be permitted in national parks, wilderness parks, state parks and reference areas consistent with the Mineral Resources Development Act. In other parts of the reserve system, mining and exploration will be permitted subject to appropriate environmental impact assessment and rehabilitation as required by the Mineral Resources Development Act.

Other Forest Products

The Central Highlands forests are important for a range of other economic activities including water production, apiculture (beekeeping), grazing and other local industries.