

# Background

The Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) for the North East region of Victoria is the third of five RFAs to be completed between the Commonwealth and State governments. East Gippsland was the first region to be covered by an RFA in February 1997. The RFA for the Central Highlands was signed in March 1998, and RFAs for the Gippsland and West regions are scheduled to be finalised at the end of 1999.

## What is the RFA?

The RFAs are a key part of the National Forest Policy Statement agreed by the Commonwealth, States and Territories in 1992.

The North East RFA will be in place for 20 years, providing certainty for industry, conservation and local communities. It has three main objectives:

- to protect environmental values in a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative Reserve System based on nationally agreed criteria;
- to encourage job creation and growth in forest-based industries, including wood products, tourism and minerals; and
- to manage all native forests in an ecologically sustainable way.

## The RFA process

The RFA process had three stages, each of which involved close consultation with stakeholder and community organisations at State and regional levels.

The first was the Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA) to provide the scientific information base for the RFA. It involved 24 projects to assess the region's:

- biodiversity
- old-growth forest
- wilderness
- economic
- world heritage
- social
- resource management
- National Estate

The next phase was the production of a **Directions Report** building upon information contained in the CRA report and the results of consultations with the community. It was widely circulated during a six-week public comment period.

After public consultation on the Directions Report, and taking into account the 700 public submissions on it the governments finalised the **Regional Forest Agreement**.