



What is the WA RFA?

Background to the RFA process

For the first time, Australia is putting in place a comprehensive national blueprint for balance, certainty and sustainability in the management of its forests - in the interests of the community as a whole, and in the interests of future generations.

The blueprint will be in the form of Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) between the Commonwealth and individual States. Planning for RFAs began back in 1992, when the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments signed the National Forest Policy Statement, agreeing to work together towards a shared vision for Australia's forests.

Victoria and the Commonwealth have already signed an RFA for East Gippsland and another for the Central Highlands. An RFA for Tasmania was signed in November 1997, and RFAs are under way in other regions of Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

The WA RFA

The Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) for Western Australia will be an agreement between the State and Commonwealth governments on the future use and management of the forests of WA's South-West. It will be for 20 years, and will be subject to five-yearly reviews. The agreement will be finalised following the six-week public consultation period that has commenced with the release of the public consultation paper.

The RFA has three main objectives:

- to protect environmental values in a world class system of national parks and other reserves
- to encourage job creation and growth in forest-based industries, including wood products, tourism and minerals; and
- to manage all native forests in a sustainable way.

For the environment, it aims to establish a reserve system which is based on nationally agreed criteria, and is Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative of the forests' biodiversity, old growth, wilderness and other natural and cultural values.

The RFA process

The RFA process began in WA nearly two years ago and is in three phases.

- The first was the Comprehensive Regional Assessment, which provides the information base for the RFA. It covers scientific assessments and initial community consultation and includes widespread community consultation.
- It was followed by the Integration Phase in which all of the assessment data was merged, culminating in the release of the public consultation paper, “Towards a Regional Forest Agreement” and a public consultation phase ending on 10 July 1998. The paper outlines the issues that need to be considered and a range of possible approaches to a long term RFA.
- The last stage of the RFA process is consideration of stakeholder and public comment on the consultation paper and development of a preferred approach for submission to the Commonwealth and State governments before signature by the Prime Minister and the Premier.

Managing the process

The process is under the direction of a Commonwealth-State Steering Committee, representing the Prime Minister and the Premier, and the Federal and State Ministers.

The Steering Committee is advised by a Panel of Independent Scientists and Experts. It also receives advice from a Stakeholder Reference Group, an Aboriginal Action Group and a State Agreement Acts Committee formed for the purpose.

The Steering Committee has the job of coordinating and facilitating the whole process, approving projects and integrating the various assessments that make up the Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA) phase.

It is assisted by technical committees that have been reviewing past research, recommending and monitoring new research projects and collating data for each assessment to ensure maintenance of high standards.