

Regional Forest Agreements Reference Group

Summary Report

The Reference Group has been appointed to enable representatives of key organisations representing diverse community interests to work together to provide advice on potential changes to the Victorian RFAs. The reference group will provide a forum for strategic discussion around relevant issues and opportunities, informed by contemporary science and community values.

Meeting 1: Monday 13 May 2019

Chair Jane Brockington

Attendees Ian Cane (Victorian Apiarists Association)
Wayne Hevey (Four Wheel Drive Victoria)
Tim Johnston (Victorian Association of Forest Industries)
Andrew Knight (Outdoors Victoria)
Jonathan La Nauze (Environment Victoria)
Mike Nurse (Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations)
Amelia Young (The Wilderness Society)

Key points of discussion

- On the 6th May 2019, the Reference Group providing advice to DELWP on the renewal of the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) met for first time. The primary purpose of the meeting was for the Group to explore the terms of reference and establish a forward work program.
- The Reference Group, comprising representatives of a variety of stakeholder interests, was welcomed by the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change and Lee Miezis, the Deputy Secretary of Forest, Fire and Regions for DELWP, who outlined the purpose and expectations of the Reference Group.
- To inform the Group's work, DELWP provided briefs on the overarching forest management modernisation program and within this the RFA renewal process. It discussed the thematic approach Victoria will take to its renewal negotiations with the Commonwealth. The main negotiations will occur in August 2019 with the renewed RFAs confirmed by March 2020.
- Dr Sandra Brizga, Chair of the Scientific Advisory Panel provided an overview of the composition and purpose of the Panel. She shared insights from the Panel's first meeting, the matters discussed and the proposed areas of focus in their work program. Strong links are being established between the Reference Group and the Scientific Advisory Panel, and the two groups are encouraged to work closely together.
- The subsequent discussion centred around the purpose of the RFAs and the parameters of the RFA modernisation process – what clauses would have to be changed, which were likely to be changed, and which were unable to be changed.
- The Group shared insights as to their interests in forest management and priorities for the RFA renewal process. It was noted that there are no provisions to create new RFAs, and that some existing RFA clauses are not open for change, which may restrict the ability for the RFAs to fully modernise. As the discussions continue, it will be important for the group to acknowledge limitations arising from this whilst ensuring advice provided and outcomes reached are meaningful.
- The Group agreed to adopt Victoria's seven negotiation themes to provide structure and focus to the Group's work program:
 - Review and accountability
 - Forest management system
 - Environmental protections

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- Timber industry development
 - Other forest values and uses
 - Traditional Owner rights and partnership
 - Research priorities (to be addressed by the Scientific Advisory Group).
- The Reference Group will consider and provide advice on the first six of those themes. The Group discussed in detail the issues and questions that require attention for each theme, and the inputs to support consideration of these. The themes and associated issues/questions are summarised at Attachment 1.
 - The order of the themes and topics was considered to be very important, as some of the themes would feed into the others. This informed the discussion of the work program, the order and the way that the group would approach the work. It was also noted sufficient time was required for Traditional Owners to be consulted prior to the Group's discussion on Traditional Owners' rights.
 - More generally, there was concern about the short time-frame available for the Group to diligently undertake its work and substantively explore each of the themes. However, given the timelines to inform and influence the negotiations, the Reference Group agreed to meet four times:
 - once in June, twice in July - where two themes would be considered per meeting supported by a short background brief prepared by DELWP to frame the discussion, supplemented by specialist advice and presentations as relevant, and
 - once in early August - to provide an opportunity for the thematic discussion to be brought together and iterated where required.
 - DELWP reiterated that even if some issues cannot be directly progressed through the RFAs, the Group's input will still be helpful for shaping Victoria's broader forest management reform program, which is far less restricted and is intended to be an ongoing, evolving and adaptive management system.
 - The Reference Group will next meet on Monday 3 June 2019 and consider themes 1 and 2.

Next Meeting

- 3rd June 2019.

Prepared by: Jane Brockington, Chairperson