

**SUBMISSION TO THE DELWP (VICTORIA GOVERNMENT) ON:
“THE MODERNISATION OF THE VICTORIAN REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENTS”**



This submission applies primarily to Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) that affect East Gippsland, Central Highlands, North East, and Gippsland.

Submitted on 7th July, 2019 to:

<https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests>

Submission Summary

The management of Victoria’s tall forests, under the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs), have been a failure, and ***should not be continued.***

Attempts at ‘modernising’ the RFAs, with the inclusion of ongoing logging of native forests, can ***only lead to further degradation*** of the multiple values of these tall forests. ‘Modernisation’ will also result in ***the precipitous loss of native-forest dependent timber jobs, due to a progressive decline in available timber, along with increasing risk and reality of events that will push the possibility of logging over the edge*** – sudden decline in threatened species numbers; higher intensity and frequency of wildfires; sudden threats to water supply; etc. ‘Modernisation’ will also lead to substantial degradation of the values of these forests, upon which their sustainable management and use in the future will depend.

In the place of the RFAs, Regional Forest Transition To Sustainable Use Plans should be developed, that provides ***a just way for workers dependent on native forest logging to find alternative employment, and for the other values of the forest to be developed and managed sustainably.***

Public native forests in Victoria should be used for ***multiple, complementary benefits***; these include: biodiversity recovery – including repair of forests previously logged; water production and security; recreation, tourism and small business development; and carbon sequestration. Major studies have already shown that ***these uses of forest can be put on a self-sustaining economic basis***, with appropriate government and private investment – this should be the goal of the Regional Forest Transition to Sustainable Use Plans.

The process of ‘consultation’ followed by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning has been ***seriously flawed***, and should not be repeated in future exercises of this type; this should be taken into account when making submissions provided through this process, and the ***Expert Panel set up to assess the future of Victoria’s native forests should be given extra weighting, along with being allowed to consider the option of phasing logging out of native forests***, and not just commenting on the ‘modernising’ of native forest agreements.

The value of native forest repair and re-forestation for reducing Victoria’s greenhouse gas emissions should be upgraded, and taken seriously, in particular as a result of the significance of forests for reducing Victoria’s emissions, and actually reversing emissions, in the recent Combet Report (2019).

As part of the Regional Transition Plans, the future **supply of wood to the Maryvale Pulp and Paper Mills should be re-negotiated**, by enacting clause 32 in the existing agreement, on the basis that over 40% of the native forest area designated for wood supply to Maryvale has been recently burnt by fire. The native forest wood supply to Maryvale can be **progressively replaced by paper fibre from recycled paper stocks** currently building up across Melbourne.

Failure of Regional Forest Agreements & Futility Of ‘Modernising’ RFAs

Despite various reports to government, including the flawed Jackson (2019) report (see below), there is clear evidence that the Regional Forest Agreements in Victoria have failed – this includes the State Government’s own recognition that the RFAs need to be ‘modernised’. The take of native wood from public native forests is in decline, and the number of jobs associated with native forest logging has also declined. This has led, for example, to the action by the Victorian State Government in 2018 to half-purchase the Heyfield Mill – to preserve remaining jobs, because the government was not able to guarantee supply of wood to the mill on any basis that makes it economically viable.

It is abundantly clear that current levels of native forest harvesting are not sustainable, and future harvesting is highly likely to be unsustainable also. Change is coming as a result of market forces and loss of supply (driven by historic over harvesting and also, to a significant degree, by the increased fire activity we are seeing as a result of climate change). According to long term, in depth research of Victoria’s central highland forests “logging has caused an ‘extinction debt’ that is highly likely (92% certainty) to trigger an ecosystem-wide collapse within 50 years” (Burns, Lindenmeyer et al 2017).

There is high-level conflict in the public forests that supply wood to sawmills and pulp-mills in Eastern and Northern Victoria, and clear evidence that the threatened species that depend on these forests are not in recovery, as evidenced by the recent re-listing of the Leadbeaters Possum as Critically Endangered. In many areas, the push to find coupes for logging by VicForests have resulted in severe incursions into identified habitat of many threatened species, including the Leadbeaters Possum, Greater Glider, Barred Galaxia and Eastern Quoll.

This conflict between logging and the maintenance and recovery of threatened species will only increase, further threatened by the increasing risk of high intensity bushfires, as a result of climate change. The conflict is so great, and capacity of VicForests to manage these values of forests so incompetent, that the community, through organisations such as WOTCH (Wildlife of the Central Highlands) have become the authoritative organisation to detect threatened species and report on infringements of their protection – even under the current inadequate regulations for protection. For example, in 2018 WOTCH reported on 27 major incursions of existing logging regulations in our Eastern forests, none of which have been challenged by VicForests. In only one case did DELWP attempt to prosecute VicForests for one of these incursions, and their case was thrown out because they failed to legally frame the case properly = evidence based: Failure! Failure! Failure!

There is no evidence that VicForests will come up with a plan for taking wood from native forests that protects the multiple values and assets of these forests. As explored in the recent Federal Court Case: Friends of Leadbeaters Possum & Environmental Justice Australia VS VicForests, the defendant VicForests was not able to describe any ‘modern’ logging practices that will adequately protect the biodiversity values of the forests under their management. The community have not been given details of what these practices will look like, a clear inadequacy of the current ‘consultation’ process. It is highly likely that any even

half-adequate logging practice will lead to severe reductions in the wood available from these forests, to the extent that existing sawmill and pulp mill needs will not be able to be met.

As noted by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (2017)

“... further fires, detection of additional new Leadbeaters possum colonies, or reductions in volume due to climate or other disturbances, will exacerbate pressures for further downward revisions of wood supply level. Sustainable harvest levels have been reduced by more than 50 per cent over the past decade. These reductions have occurred due to the impacts of unexpected events, such as major landscape level bushfires and Leadbeaters possum discoveries. Accounting for future potential losses due to unexpected events such as bushfires presents a significant challenge for VicForests and creates a potential vulnerability for the native forest industry, which is looking for some security in the forest resource in the medium term. In addition to unexpected events, climate change presents a long-term threat to the viability of the native forest resource.”

Regional Forest Transition Plans for Multiple Complementary & Sustainable Uses

Use of public native forests in Victoria should be directed towards activities with multiple, complementary benefits: biodiversity recovery – including repair of forests previously logged; water production and security; recreation, tourism and small business development; and carbon sequestration. Native forest logging is clearly oppositional rather than complementary with these activities.

Emissions Reduction, Carbon Sequestration and Transition Out of Native Forest Logging

There are some obvious aspects of transition related activity that were outlined in the recent Independent expert advice on interim targets (the Combet report) which was prepared for the Victorian State Government. This report notes that there are “opportunities to substantially increase the carbon sink provided by Victoria’s land sector ... The next largest opportunity (beyond electricity generation) is Victoria’s land sector with significant potential to increase the carbon sink from on farm forestry and changes in forest management on public land. Unlocking this opportunity is highly dependent on strong policy action.” (pgs. 9 & 10).

The Combet report makes reference to the opportunities that rethinking native forest management can contribute towards Victoria’s carbon emissions reduction. “The Panel believes that the IPCC special report on 1.5°C of warming points both to the need to start reducing emissions as quickly as possible, and to the importance of investigating options to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This could involve supporting research and development for carbon dioxide removal technologies and, more immediately, developing policies to support increased emissions sequestration through reforestation and forest management, where appropriate, alongside other policy priorities such as biodiversity protection, water, food production and regional jobs and economic development.” (pg. 33).

In the case of the La Trobe Valley and surrounding area and forests transition, there are employment opportunities in:

- Ecological restoration in areas currently harvested for timber
- Plantation establishment on farmland
- Fire control and management in native forests
- In time, employment in harvesting native timber from plantations is an option

In terms of economic sustainability, it has been shown that the creation of the Great Forest National Park (or equivalent) is expected to generate up to 760 FTE jobs. This will also result in a major increase in economic activity in the region, well in excess of existing financial returns from logging native forests in the area. Returns to the state budget, through tax revenue raised from this economic activity can, over time, establish repair of these forests as cost neutral, so additional government inputs into emissions reductions by protecting forests can be cost neutral, with ongoing emissions reductions through continuing carbon sequestration by these forests.

The information provided by the DELWP Consultation Process on the issue of carbon and forests is entirely inadequate. Fact Sheet 8 of the consultation process: Valuing forest carbon provides no solid figures or evidence on the comparative role of native forests in storing carbon as a result of logging, compared with storing carbon by repairing forests. This is despite existing research from the Fenner School of Environment (Australian National University) having carried out research the contribution of Victoria's forests to emissions, and potential reduction in emissions in each of these scenarios (Lindenmeyer & Mackey, 2015). This research has already noted that "Native forest logging results in significant greenhouse gas emissions, because, typically, less than 5% of the biomass carbon of logged forests ends up as long-term timber products" and "logging of several thousand hectares of Victoria's Mountain Ash forest each year produces emissions equivalent to about one-third of the annual greenhouse gas emissions of Yallourn power station."

The Jackson report is not helpful either. The report only considers (pg. 'total forest ecosystem biomass and carbon in Victorian public forests', which also includes forest park and reserves, so is not applicable to consideration of the effects of RFA's. On the basis that 'Victoria's Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector has become a net sink of carbon emissions' the Jackson report rates management of public forests for carbon management and sequestration as 'Good Practice' – a completely inadequate assessment in light of the Combet (2019) report. At the same time, the Jackson (2019) report notes that forests have 'become a net sink of carbon emissions, except for years when major bushfires occurred', and yet, even with clear evidence that bushfires are on the increase in forested areas, and predicted to increase with climate change, there is not attempt to quantify what this contribution might be. This is particularly relevant, in the light of recent research that older tall forests are more resistant to major fires than younger forests, including forests recovering from logging.

In summary, in terms of contributing to emissions reductions in Victoria, transition out of native forestry logging can make a major contribution to reducing Victoria's emissions, for two reasons:

- Firstly, Native forest logging currently makes up a significant proportion of the greenhouse gas emissions in Victoria. By stopping logging, we can stop these emissions.
- Secondly, Victoria's forests are the most carbon dense in the world. Given a chance to continue to grow, and to repair, they are highly effective at sucking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

Forest Protection and Repair for Water Security, Biodiversity Recovery and Economic Viability

Studies on the importance of our native forests for water supply and security, biodiversity recovery and economic viability are numerous, and yet these aspects of forest value and

use do not appear to be adequately covered in any of the reports commissioned by DELWP for the review of the RFA.

In comparison, a major study by Nous Consulting (2017) for the Wilderness Society, for the establishment of a Great Forest National Park (GFNP) has found, for the central highlands area:

“The scientific case for the GFNP has been examined relatively extensively. The ecological imperative for protecting the Mountain Ash ecosystem of the Central Highlands from further damage (and the threatened species which inhabit it such as Leadbeaters possum), and the value of ecosystem services such as biodiversity preservation, water provisioning and carbon sequestration have been considered in detail in other research.” (Nous 2017 – Summary Report, pg. 1).

This research has further found that (Nous 2017, pg 38-39):

“Establishing the GFNP will expand and connect reserves and national parks in the Central Highlands to better deal with the challenges facing the Mountain Ash forest ecosystem. This larger, connected reserve system will facilitate the restoration of natural fire regimes and growth of large old trees.⁹⁴ In the case of a major disturbance event, the expanded reserve system will also likely be larger than the area affected which will build resilience in the landscape. ⁹⁵ This is in contrast to the 2009 wildfires where the total area impacted was larger than the entire park reserve system, resulting in the inability of the areas affected to recover due to intensively modified areas of forest isolating them and impeding movement between fragments.⁹⁶ By better protecting the Mountain Ash forest ecosystem, the GFNP will support:

- preservation of biodiversity
- carbon sequestration; and
- water provisioning. “

Each of these is discussed in turn in the report.

In particular for preservation of biodiversity (Nous 2017, pg 39):

“The large old trees in the Mountain Ash ecosystem ... support endangered wildlife. Notably, large old trees with cavities are a critical habitat for Leadbeaters Possum, Victoria’s faunal emblem. Leadbeaters Possum has been listed by the Australian Government as critically endangered and the loss of large old trees as a nesting and denning resource further compromises its continuing survival.

The reduced, fragmented nature of old growth forest threatens the viability of other cavity-dependent species. More than 30 other cavity-using species are on a trajectory towards localised extinction in the Mountain Ash Forests of the Central Highlands. A 2016 report presenting a set of experimental ecosystem accounts developed for the Central Highlands assessed the number of species classified as threatened, the threat categories and change in categories over time. Changes in threat category for a species represent changes in the extinction risk and are taken by the study to be indicative of changes in size and condition of all biodiversity in the Central Highlands area. There has been an increase in the number of critically endangered species in the last 15 years. Specific species added to the critically endangered category include:

- Leadbeaters Possum
- Regent Honeyeater
- Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
- Round-leaf Pomaderris
- Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly

The remaining forest cover is also an important part of the habitat range for the Sooty Owl and the Baw Baw frog (Victoria's only endemic frog which has been listed as critically endangered under IUCN and is found only on the plateau and escarpments of Mont Baw Baw). Monitoring focused on arboreal marsupials over the past 25 years found there is a significant positive relationship between animal occurrence and hollow-bearing trees, higher numbers of animals and species in old growth forest and a significant decrease in the number of animals over time."

For carbon sequestration (Nous 2017, pg 40) :

"Mountain Ash forest is 1,819 tC/ha (tonnes of carbon per hectare) in living, above-ground biomass and 2,844 tC/ha in total biomass in old growth forest. In Mountain Ash forest that has been logged, these values are significantly lower (as low as 262 tC/ha). Modelling of biomass carbon stocks in the Central Highlands found a total carbon stock in 2015 of 146 Mt C (megatonnes of carbon). Net annual increment in carbon stock, which represents the physical ecosystem service of sequestration and has value for climate change mitigation, was found to be 1.7 Mt C per year. This is worth approximately \$20 million based on a carbon price of \$12.25 per tonne. The modelling also estimated the difference in the carbon density of logged and unlogged areas as an average of 143 tC/ha. This carbon stock loss due to logging was worth approximately \$1,755 per hectare once again using a carbon price of \$12.25. Areas with high carbon stocks have been identified across Toolangi, Warburton, Lake Mountain and the Royston Ranges. However, only half of the forest with high carbon stock falls in existing reserves. The GFNP will protect these forests from degradation and deforestation in order to maintain their carbon stocks, and allow previously logged forests to regrow, providing a valuable ecosystem service and contributing to the broader effort to combat climate change."

For water provisioning (Nous 2017, pg 41):

"Water provisioning is a valuable ecosystem service. The experimental ecosystem accounts for the Central Highlands determined the quantity of water provided by calculating runoff spatially across the study area. This runoff provides inflows to the reservoirs. In 2014-15, Melbourne Water supplied 402 GL (gigalitres) of water, earning \$876 million in revenue. Per the ecosystem accounts, this is associated with an industry value added (contribution to GDP) of \$267 million which is equivalent to \$2,319 per hectare (based on a catchment area of 115,149 hectares). Water yields are maximised in old growth forests. Studies conducted in the Central Highlands specifically found that runoff decreases when forest condition is disturbed and that areas disturbed by clearfelling or wildfire have significantly lower runoff. Clearly, establishing the GFNP will more effectively protect water catchments, yielding significant benefits for Melburnians in the long run."

Supply of Wood to Maryvale Pulp Mills

Any transition out of logging in native forests, or consideration of supply of wood under the RFAs (including the effects of 'modernisation of RFAs on wood supply), should take account of the current Resource Supply Agreement (RSA) between the State Government and the owners of the Maryvale Pulp Mills – Maryvale is by far the largest recipient of wood from native forest logging. Yet I could find no reference to the Maryvale RSA in any of the papers provided under the DELWP consultation.

A renegotiation of the government Resource Supply Agreement with Maryvale Pulp Mills (Nippon) could be achieved by replacing the existing native trees that feed the mills at Maryvale with the mountains of recycled paper that are currently stored across Melbourne, and more widely in Victoria. The previous owners of Maryvale (Ampcor) had developed a policy of moving out of using native forest wood for paper production at the mill, in part by

shifting to increased use of recycled paper. When Nippon took over ownership of the mills in 2009, the use of native forest wood for paper production did not decline, as planned by Amcor, and the production of recycled paper declined.

A major reduction in use of native forest timber for wood production can be achieved by collaborative developing strategies between the state government, Nippon and the NGOs and communities of Victoria. This would be aimed at increasing (again) Victorians' use of paper made from higher component recycled paper, along with supporting a re-fit the pulp mills as appropriate for producing greater amounts of paper from recycled material.

In summary, there is a future for workers in forestry related industries in Victoria, based on a rethink of what these jobs look like, and what they are producing, with appropriate transition of workers into these new types of production (repairing forests for carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, and new economic activity based on new reserves; producing paper from recycled resources rather than native forest wood).

Flawed Process of Consultation by DELWP Over RFAs

My experience of the RFA consultation process set up by DELWP is that, at every stage of my involvement, there has been serious compromises in the way that the consultation process has been set up, and implemented. These are as follows:

1. A decision about continuation of the RFAs has already been made. There is ample evidence that non-continuation of logging of native forests under the RFAs should at least be considered as one of the options put forward, but the consultation process appears to have already been pre-set around a narrow decision to 'modernise' the RFAs. For example, the Jackson (2019) paper reveals that "During the most recent review of the Victorian RFAs (2009-2014), 426 submissions were received from stakeholders during an eleven-week public consultation period. The majority of these submissions (80 per cent) were ... highly critical of the RFAs." If it is the purpose of DELWP to "listen, work alongside and partner with the people of Victoria, in everything DELWP does", then how is it that a pre-emptive decision has already been made to continue with RFAs in some form, rather than openly consider the future of RFAs?
2. The previous survey-only approach to consultation with the wider community clearly only offered alternatives for most questions that are highly skewed towards giving answers that are positive or at least neutral for RFAs. I will not give specific examples – imagine the frustration at trying to fill in this survey if you are of the view that RFAs should be discontinued. You would imagine that, given the majority of individual early submissions on RFAs (80%) were negative about the RFAs, this survey would be adjusted accordingly in a second round of surveying. Yet the survey currently on the DELWP 'consultation' website has not been adjusted, giving the impression that DELWP are not really interested in finding out what the views of Victorians are about RFAs, but rather trying to evoke responses around a pre-existing 'modernisation' agenda.
3. You would imagine that there would be a focus from DELWP on ascertaining the views of the people living in Melbourne of the RFAs. The central highlands of Eastern and Northern Victoria (Toolangi, Healesville, Kinglake, etc.) are within easy (1.5 hr) driving distance from the centre of Melbourne, and the network of freeways running around Melbourne and Eastward make these forests easily accessible by residents of Melbourne. Many Melbourne residents have a long and frequent experience of visiting our local tall forests. Some of the highest impacts of logging under the RFAs have been in these forests. Yet there has only been one consultation session scheduled for Melbourne, and none in the outer West. This is not an argument about the need for consultations in other parts of Victoria, but given the high population of Melbourne, one would think there would

be more than one consultation session. And this was only organised last minute, on Friday 28/7/19, leaving only two subsequent days for people to make submissions after conversations with DELWP representatives. I was sent an email alerting me to these consultations on Monday 25/7/19, and I reorganised my schedule, last minute, to attend. Then I became aware that there was going to be a vigil for the forests outside the consultation venue, so I decided to attend this and the consultation. Then I was alerted, through word of mouth, that the consultation might be called off last minute, out of concern that people were intending to hold a vigil – that is, the community input was being called off because some of the community were going to assemble outside to express their views on the RFA. I did not receive any follow-up email from DELWP that the consultation was being called off. When I arrived, I found that the venue was blocked by three black suited security guards, and a line of police. So much for consulting the Melbourne community. And I still have not received any email response from DELWP, informing me of the decision to call off the consultation session, or what alternatives were being put in place – although some others on the DEWLP email list did. I only found out about the extension of a week for the written submissions when I attended the blocked off venue and read the sign posted there. This leads me to query whether DELWP have the wider Melbourne population in view as a stakeholder in the consultation process? What does this say about DELWP's view as to who the 'community' is, who actually owns this land and these forests? Specific subsets of the Victorian population.

If there is to be further input into decision-making about the RFAs, then this lack of competency needs to change. In various documents, DELWP refer to concerns held by communities about the trustworthiness of DELWP and its decision-making processes. Given the three points above, it is not a great secret as to why.

References

Combet Report (2019). Interim Emissions Reduction Targets for Victoria. Report to the Victorian State Government, May.

Jackson, W. (2019). Independent Consultation Paper. Modernisation of the Regional Forest Agreements. Report to DELWP, May.

Lindenmeyer, D. & Makey, B. (2015). Native forests can help hit emissions targets – if we leave them alone. The Conversation, July 23.

Nous Group (2017). Great Forest National Park: economic contribution of park establishment, park management, and visitor expenditure. Report to The Wilderness Society (Australia)

For both the survey, submission and drop in sessions it is critical that we are strong on the key messages.

Victoria is the only State to not roll over the RFA's without a review and as a result it is important to engage and make the following points repeatedly:

- **RFA's must simply be allowed to expire, and that's the negotiating position you as the community want the state government to take when negotiations recommence in August**
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- **under no circumstances can the exemption from the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act) (for the logging industry only) be allowed to continue**

(This is clearly important even though the [current MOU between the Commonwealth and the state](#) says that there will be RFA's for another 20 years and that the exemption from the EPBC will apply!!).

Please ask these questions:

- on what scientific, social or economic basis have the governments determined that the exemption from the EBPC ought to continue? (link to Leadbeaters case in the Federal Court)
- how are governments confident there is sufficient wood remaining in state forests to continue logging them -- what is the evidence for this?
- how do governments propose to model for and manage for bushfire risk going forward -- how exactly will this happen under any continued RFA's?

What's also important is for RFA's to instead become regional forest industry transition agreements -- that support the transition out of the native forest logging industry, and the transition for people and economies into carbon, water, tourism, recreation and conservation management industries.

Great Background papers and information useful for your survey responses/ submission:

1 What is a RFA?

If you need to start with 'what the hell are the RFA's'??, then here is your go to 'sortof TED talk' in an interview with [REDACTED] on the Regional Forest Agreements (made by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] from Tarkine Association Victoria):

<https://www.facebook.com/tarkineassociationvictoria/videos/1945623385685806/?v=1945623385685806>

2 eNGO's input into the RFA's

A number of eNGOs have together prepared the summary report of our key issues and input into the RFAs. Use this as a resource and reflect any and all of the arguments

therein: https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/413680/Round-Table-Environmental-NGOs-3-26-October.pdf

(For context of the RFA roundtables,

see: <https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests/get-involved/consultation-to-date>)

3 **FOE Forest Collective background info** – thanks █████ and all!

The Victorian government is doing a public survey to assess future forest management. There is a danger that industry lobbying may result in a further 20 years of unsustainable logging for paper (75%) and timber (25% of logs, industry figures), if communities fail to speak out.

We have matched the survey questions with responses (IN BOLD), as a guide in case you are concerned, like us, that too much forest has been destroyed already.

Of course it is better if you respond to the survey in your own words, with your own opinion.

THIS IS JUST A GUIDE

Survey is at <https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests>

1 What changes have you seen in the RFA regions?

Sawmills closed, river and creek water levels down, plants and animals killed, local economies trashed, farmers worried.

2. What should the Victorian RFAs aim to achieve over the next 20 years?

The RFAs should be allowed to lapse, to expire at the end of their current extended term, meaning a full transition away from native forest logging.

3. What are the potential improvements you think should be made?

- During transition, remove the RFA exemption from the Commonwealth Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act), unique to the logging industry, to put it on the same basis as any other industry that could impact EPBC listed species.

- Discontinue extraction of pulplogs from native forest in the transition period,

referred to in RFAs as residual logs. This erroneously suggests such logs remain after a greater quantity has gone to sawlogs, but under the RFAs the amount of pulplogs has increased about seventy times beyond the 1937 residual amount (5000 cu.m.), and sawlogs are downgraded to meet pulplog quotas.

- Meet the commitment for 350,000 cu.m./year pulplogs to Australian Paper until 30 June 2030 from sources outside native forest or else terminate the contract (if there is a problem with availability).

4. How could the potential improvements in the consultation paper help modernise the Victorian RFAs?

Manage forests for conservation, water supply, tourism, other economic & social opportunities, and accept that wood production, export woodchipping and paper pulp have depleted our forest at unsustainable levels.

Any further development of the wood & paper products industry should use plantation sources, which will be more economically viable when not competing with a subsidised logging industry in public native forests.

5. Do you have any views on which potential improvements are most important?

In the face of the current climate emergency, maintaining intact native forests as a carbon sink is the best course of action for the public estate.

THEME ONE: ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

The Independent Consultation Paper suggests that:

Whilst the vision of Australia's National Forest Policy Statement included a 'holistic' approach to managing forests for all their values and uses, so as to optimise benefits to the community, the Victorian RFAs have tended to focus on conservation of forest biodiversity and timber production. ...

6. How do you use forests in your region?

Regularly visiting the forest, bearing witness to biodiversity loss, saddened by threatened species decline.

7. How could the RFAs better provide for multiple forest uses (i.e. recreation, conservation, livelihood and economy)?

By terminating the unsustainable native forest logging industry and lapsing the RFAs.

1.2 CONSERVE FOREST DIVERSITY AND MAINTAIN ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

The Independent Consultation Paper suggests that:

Two decades ago, the RFA process supported the expansion of the *Comprehensive, Adequate & Representative* (CAR) reserve system and included a focus on

threatened species. However, despite these efforts, biodiversity continues to be lost from Victoria and further effort is needed to halt and reverse the decline. ...

8. What are your views on existing environmental protections afforded across the entire forest estate (including parks, reserves and State forests) through the RFAs?

Environmental protections are woefully inadequate, connectivity is lacking, limiting re-colonisation of Cool Temperate Rainforest and Cool Temperate Mixed Forest (both listed Threatened Communities in Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act) into areas where they previously occurred. With climate impacts increasing, the State Government has a duty of care to maintain forest integrity, especially in areas of Wet Sclerophyll forest containing Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), the tallest of all flowering trees.

9. How could the environmental protections be improved?

As noted above, remove the RFA exemption from the EPBC Act, which is unique to the logging industry, like any other industry that could impact EPBC listed species. Transition jobs away from public native forest, adopt longer rotations for trees in plantations for future timber supply, not just for paper.

1. What changes have you seen in the RFA regions?

Establish new plantations on suitable land to enhance connectivity between forest areas.

1.3 PROMOTE TRADITIONAL OWNER RIGHTS AND PARTNERSHIP

The Independent Consultation Paper suggests that:

DELWP has already committed to building collaborative relationships and working partnerships with Victorian Traditional Owner groups. This includes increasing the involvement of Traditional Owner groups in the management of country. ...

10. What opportunities could the RFAs provide to support access to and traditional use of forests by Traditional Owners and Aboriginal people?

Get logging out of native forest so there are still some values intact on country for traditional custodians.

11. How could the RFAs enable the legal rights of Traditional Owners to partner in land management and seek economic and cultural opportunities to be realised in future forest management?

Create opportunities for first nation stakeholder groups to have custodianship restored within a multiple purpose reserve system.

THEME TWO: THE LONG-TERM STABILITY OF FORESTS AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

2.1 ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AND OTHER LARGE SCALE DISTURBANCES

The Independent Consultation Paper suggests that:

Climate change and other large-scale disturbances, including landscape-level fires

and invasive species, are threats to Victoria's forest biodiversity, forest-dependent industries and the communities that live near forests. ...

12. How could the RFAs consider climate change and other large-scale natural disturbances (including bushfires)? **Accept scientific reports linking logged forest areas (for timber and paper production) to dryer landscapes, loss of rainforest understorey species and consequently an increased fire-risk.**

Regeneration burns after logging further add to this risk, and do not meet the same regulatory standards that are imposed on other industries for incineration of waste.

Restoration of Cool Temperate and Warm Temperate rainforest species reduces fire risk.

2.2 SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREST DEPENDENT INDUSTRIES

The Independent Consultation Paper suggests that:

The Victorian RFAs have not achieved long-term stability of supply for the timber industry. Without certainty of supply, it is difficult for the timber industry to invest with confidence, to develop value added approaches to processing wood products or to support efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions using low embodied energy building materials ... 13. How could the RFAs better address industry sustainability?

Funding for plantations set up and managed on longer rotations so they can supply timber not just paper.

14. How could the RFAs encourage investment and new market opportunities for forest-based industries (including the forests and wood products industry, tourism, apiary and emerging markets such as carbon)?

Carbon sequestration is the most important investment for the future, as it is critical to achieving emission reduction targets. Other viable uses and industries (water security, beekeeping, seed supply for plant nurseries) are compatible where forest is retained.

Supply of water from the de-salination plant is equal to the loss of catchment water yield after logging.

THEME THREE: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF VICTORIA'S FORESTS

3.1 SUPPORT THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO IMPROVE FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The Independent Consultation Paper suggests that:

Victoria's approach to forest management planning has served the State well, but forest management plans now require renewal. The Victorian Government has indicated an intention to update forest management plans and it is important that this happens. ...

15. How can the RFAs support the adaptive management of Victoria's forests in response to emerging issues (e.g. major bushfires) and opportunities (e.g. emerging industries)?

There should be no experimentation at the expense of threatened species habitat, under any guise. Ecologically sustainable forest management (ESFM) is best evaluated away from public native forest, with plantations for timber & paper, using accounting & inventory systems realistic for a viable future resource.

3.2 IDENTIFY RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The Independent Consultation Paper suggests that:

The Australian and Victorian Governments recognise that continuing research can contribute to improved outcomes for adaptive management and continual improvement in forest management, as well as in the management of Matters of National Environmental Significance, social impacts and benefits, and industry development. ...

16. What areas of research would better equip us to sustainably manage Victoria's forests?

Current research is adequate to show that the forest has been managed unsustainably under the RFAs, & needs the opportunity to recover. Continued degradation of threatened species habitat, and diminished areas for species survival is the result. Research should focus on ways to best achieve a recovery of lost forest values so that further extinctions can be avoided. To restore the forest to its former condition will take hundreds of years.

3.3 IMPROVE MONITORING AND REPORTING

The Independent Consultation Paper suggests that:

Forest management needs to be based on robust data and systematically monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the objectives of forest management

17. How could RFA monitoring, review (including five-yearly reviews) and reporting arrangements be improved?

The RFA process to date has failed on all reporting milestones.

There has been a culture of forest degradation, and there is no point in continuation of this trend.

When the Victorian RFAs expire, they should be allowed to lapse, and transition to new industry goals in the plantation sector implemented.

4 Wilderness/ [REDACTED] has a great 2 page briefing paper on RFA's:

- **RFAs have failed to meet their core objectives:**

- the reserve system created is inadequate to conserve biodiversity;
- forests are not being ecologically or sustainably managed;

- logging industry continues to be plagued by instability and uncertainty.
- **RFAs are out of date, and no longer fit for purpose.** They do not take into account the social, economic and environmental threats and impacts of climate change, nor the role of forests in sequestering carbon, nor the cumulative impacts of successive bushfires.
- **The RFAs grant one industry—native forest logging—an exemption** from the assessment and approvals process under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* ('EPBC Act'); this exemption is disastrous for forest biodiversity.
- **Wildlife is being pushed to extinction**, with tens of thousands of hectares of critical habitat for forest dependent threatened species, such as the Leadbeater's possum and the Greater Glider, being logged under the RFAs.
- **More than 20,000 hectares of old-growth forest has been logged** in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland since the RFA regulatory arrangements were signed.
- **Jobs and skills in the logging industry continue to decline** as does the supply of native forest wood and fibre volumes.

Opportunities

- **Expiry of the Victorian RFAs provided a long overdue opportunity for removal of the native forest logging industry's unique exemption from national environment law, and instead strengthen environmental laws, create new national parks and reserves and transition the logging industry to plantations.**
- **The two-year extension of the Victorian RFAs continues this special treatment for the logging industry.**
- **The mooted review must be comprehensive, and deliver radically different forest management arrangements.**

Recommendations

- **Expire** - The Wilderness Society strongly recommends that, when they reach their new expiry dates, the Victorian RFAs be allowed to expire, and that native forest logging operations be subject, like all other industries, to the assessment and approvals provisions of the EPBC Act. This is particularly important considering the industry's considerable impact on 'matters of national environmental significance' under the EPBC Act, such as nationally-listed threatened species.
- **Value all uses** - Any future forest management arrangements that replace RFAs should value and account for the full range of forest uses including; conservation, tourism, recreation, water, carbon and any limited native forest logging that may form part of a rapid industry transition.

- **Reassessment** - Any future arrangements must be based on a thorough and comprehensive consultation and reassessment of the RFAs including the changed social, environmental and economic context of forest management.

5 Nippon Paper Industries and the Wood Pulp Agreement

<http://woodpulpagreement.org/nippon-paper-industries-maryvale-mills-and-the-forests-of-victoria/>

This report reviews the origin and history of successive legislative agreements under which pulp logs are supplied to Nippon Paper Industries Co. Ltd's Maryvale pulp and paper processing mills in Gippsland. It provides an analysis and review of the forests impacted by the current Legislative Supply Agreement (LSA), otherwise referred to as the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996. This report focuses on the Mountain Forests covering large areas of Gippsland and its state forests. A spatial analysis of disturbance in the Mountain Forests has been carried out and the report also reviews academic and government literature concerning the forests' capacity to supply wood to Maryvale.

The report covers the following points:

- The Maryvale Mills were originally established in 1938 on the premise that they had a 50-year legislated supply of pulp logs from Victorian state forests, where most of the supply comes from the 'Mountain Forests', consisting of Mountain Ash and Alpine Ash;
- The present LSA was passed in 1996 on the premise that the Maryvale Mills, then owned by AMCOR Ltd, reduce their dependence on sourcing pulplogs from native forests and substitute these with pulplogs from plantations;
- In 2008, then owner PaperlinX Ltd announced its intention to exit native forests completely by 2017, having completed an upgrade of the Maryvale facilities and secured an additional supply of native forest pulp logs under a Timber Sales Agreement with VicForests;
- In 2009, Nippon Paper Industries Co. Ltd acquired PaperlinX Ltd together with the LSA. It has made no move to reduce dependence on native forest wood. However, declining supply from within the LSA area is being compensated by additional supplies from elsewhere in Victoria at an unknown cost to the taxpayer;
- No other company in the logging industry has been afforded the privilege of a legislative supply agreement, which will have endured for 94 years, if it survives as legislated, until 2030;
- More than half of the forest allocated to logging within the LSA area has been burnt since the passing of the LSA in 1996;

- The Mountain Ash Ecosystem within the LSA is now red listed by the IUCN as Critically Endangered, with logging as the primary driver compounded by bushfire (Burns, et al., 2014);
- The LSA provides for the company and the government to share information and plan jointly for the supply of pulp logs. The Act has flexibility for the government to respond to major disturbance events, such as fire.

The report concludes that this is crunch time – the Mountain Forest ecosystem faces collapse and the LSA is unsustainable. It proposes urgent consideration of the following:

1. that all reviews carried out under Clause 12 of the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996 be published;
2. that the annual Plan of Utilization agreed between Paper Australia Pty Ltd and the government be published for each year from 2013 when VicForests announced reductions in Ash sawlog supply;
3. that the proposed Plan of Utilization for 2018, due to be prepared by 30 April, be published; and
4. that the Victorian Government invoke the provisions of Clause 32 of the Act and potentially suspend the legislated supply of pulp logs, given that more than half of the state forest allocated to logging under the LSA has been impacted by recent fires.