

Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements

Feedback from Inner North Parents for Climate Action

Contact: 

About our group

We are a group of approximately 270 people who reside in Melbourne's inner northern suburbs. The purpose of this group is to encourage and support parents, grandparents and carers getting engaged with climate action.

Our aims are

1. To build community connections around climate action in Inner North Melbourne
2. To provide resources for concerned parents and carers to help them parent and feel supported emotionally in the era of the climate emergency
3. To filter actions by other groups that are parents / family friendly to help busy parents engage on climate
4. To act as a voice for frustrated parents and carers to be heard by politicians and leaders
5. To feed into Australian Parents for Climate Action (www.ap4ca.org) and support national actions

Summary of our feedback:

- We want to see the forest ecosystems and carbon stores of Victoria's native forests protected into the future
- We don't believe that ongoing logging is compatible with a safe climate future, and that the forests' other values should be prioritised (including for carbon storage, clean water generation, habitat for wildlife, and recreation and tourism)
- The Regional Forest Agreements are an outdated framework and we don't believe that retrofitting them via a 'modernisation' process will benefit Victoria, if logging is still ongoing
- We support the establishment of the Great Forest National Park in the Central Highlands and the Emerald Link in East Gippsland, and we ask the Victorian Government to act urgently to establish these parks for their many values to our children and grandchildren, and to regional communities

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the Independent Consultation Paper 'Modernising the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements' has been developed by Dr William Jackson.

We welcome the chance to share our perspective on the future of Victoria's native forests, which we believe are at a critical point in terms of the sustainability of regional communities, our state's timber and paper industries, and of course the ecological values of the forests.

We reside in Melbourne's inner northern suburbs, but many of us have lived and worked in regional Victoria previously, and many of us have visited and enjoyed Victoria's native forests - including with our children. We recognise that our clean air, water supplies, and food systems are connected to the health of Victoria's forests.

We want Victoria's native forests to thrive into the future so that these ecosystems and the carbon they store are not eradicated through human activities, and so that our children and future generations are able to benefit from the many values that intact, healthy native forests provides to us all.

Our view is that the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) are a vastly outdated management framework, and that 'modernising' them will not allow for the ongoing survival of Victorian native forests.

We don't believe that the RFAs have fulfilled their intention to balance the needs of the ecosystems, industry and communities, especially when you consider the many additional considerations they did not include (e.g. those changes since their establishment listed on page 6 of the Independent Consultation Paper), most notably the impacts of climate change. It is clear that we need a new approach to forest management, rather than retrofitting an outdated and ineffective framework.

We don't believe that logging of native forests, as is currently supported under the RFAs, is compatible with a safe climate future.

We support the establishment of the Great Forest National Park in the Central Highlands and the Emerald Link in East Gippsland, and we ask the Victorian Government to act urgently to establish these parks for their many values to our children and grandchildren, and to regional communities.

Responses to themes included in the Independent Consultation Paper

THEME ONE: ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Victorian native forests should be managed to protect the many values of an intact forest ecosystem, including for carbon, habitat, clean water supply (for Melbourne and agricultural industries), recreation and tourism.

These values are severely compromised by current clearfell logging practices. For that reason we don't believe that the RFAs should continue, as they allow for the ongoing extractive practices to damage our remaining native forest assets.

1.2 CONSERVE FOREST DIVERSITY AND MAINTAIN ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

As parents we believe it is unconscionable for iconic species such as Victoria's animal emblem, the Leadbeater's Possum, to be forced into extinction during our lifetime through the destruction of their habitat by clearfell logging, leaving our children and future generations with vastly depleted local biodiversity.

The exemptions and poor protections currently in place under the RFA framework must be urgently addressed, so that state and federal environmental protections have priority. By giving logging a blanket exemption from federal environmental

laws, the RFAs are threatening the collapse of critically endangered animal species and a critically endangered forest type, the Mountain Ash forests of Victoria.

1.3 PROMOTE TRADITIONAL OWNER RIGHTS AND PARTNERSHIP

We believe it is essential that Traditional Owners have rights, leadership, and meaningful input into the decisions made about Victoria's native forests.

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

2.1 ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AND OTHER LARGE SCALE DISTURBANCES

The RFAs' failure to consider climate change is a key problem with the framework, and another reason they aren't suited to the task of long-term management of our forest estate even if they are retrofitted to consider climate change under a 'modernisation' process.

As long as they allow logging of the very carbon-dense old trees of Victoria's native forests, they will continue to exacerbate climate change, and in turn be vulnerable to its effects.

Bushfire is another large scale 'disturbance' which must be better considered. The threat and impacts of fire on the forest ecosystem and surrounding communities must be factored in to Victoria's forest management and bushfire preparations, including consideration of how logging activities affect fire.

2.2 SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREST DEPENDENT INDUSTRIES

We are concerned about economically unsustainable model that Victoria's native forests currently works with. We don't support the loss of remaining regional jobs and income that is inevitable when the wood supply from native forests runs out (as is plainly evident now).

For this reason, we urge the state government to plan for a shift to entirely plantation-based timber and fibre industries in Victoria.

In addition to a viable, sustainable plantation-based wood products sector, there's ongoing value to regional communities and our whole state in well-managed national parks for tourism, recreation, camping, and associated boosts to regional economies.

THEME THREE: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF VICTORIA'S FORESTS

Victoria's forest management must be vastly improved so that these ecosystems thrive into the future, and our view based on the available science is that unsustainable logging should be ended in our native forests.

This industry is not viable economically (as evidenced by ongoing subsidies) or environmentally. The aim to 'balance' interests, attempting to continue logging while aiming to preserve other forest values, has not worked under the RFAs.

It's clear that for too long, the interests of one industry have prevailed over the many other values and stakeholders who have an interest in healthy forests into the future - for example the children of Victoria.

Traditional Owners, regional communities and businesses (including wood products industries other than native forest logging), and scientists must have a seat at the table.