

To the Victorian State Government and Traditional Owners

c/o Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Please find below my submission on the future of our native forests in Victoria. I have also provided specific information and recommendations on regional forest agreements and future options.

Background:

As a member of Ballarat Environment Network I attended a session by DELWP in Ballarat where we were encouraged to identify the key values of forests and public land within our region.

I have also attended information sessions provided by VEAC as part of their Central West Investigation and final recommendations of public land to the Victorian Government.

I have also used my experience of twenty five years as a farmer and landcare member at [REDACTED] and eighteen years of professional work with Trust for Nature assessing private land for conservation covenants and /or purchase to inform this submission. [REDACTED] and for the last eleven years have noted its deterioration in forest health, structure, fauna linkages and provision of ecological services.

Key Points:

Current scientific evidence, both international, national and state show, via recent assessments of the State's of flora and fauna, decline.

In 2015, mountain ash forests were listed as critically endangered within the International Union for the Conservation of Nature [IUCN] Red List of Ecosystems. Mountain ash are a preferred logging species In Victoria. The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, VEAC's Fibre and Wood Supply Assessment 2017] highlights a large decline in wood supply within these forests due to logging and wildfires.

Threatened species such as the Lead Beaters Possum has been uplisted to Critically Endangered and the Greater Glider added to Federal and State Lists as Vulnerable to Extinction.

Recently, media reports have noted Australia's first species extinction due to climate change.

Regional Forest Agreements have not been successful in delivering "effective conservation, forest management and forest industry outcomes" as part of the Act.

None in Australia have met their objectives as evidenced by:

- the increasing number of forest dependent species listed as threatened continue to increase
- forest health is declining [I have noted this whilst visiting Mount Cole State Forest and other forest areas in western Victoria] with areas suffering loss of connectivity and structure
- specifically in East Gippsland, populations of many species have decreased by 50% in that region.

Regional Forest Agreements are not contemporary.

They do not

- meet current community and societal values
- meet national or international conservation standards eg JANIS or IUCN.
- consider future climate predictions
- consider the expected population growth of capital and regional cities and rural areas and their impacts on wildlife, habitat and linkages
- they ignore other current impacts such as wildfire, invasion of pest plants and animals, off road impacts by recreational vehicles and drought all of which contribute to cumulative impact.

Regional Forest agreements do not consider other forest values

such as ecosystem services, benefits of natural environment to public health; water, carbon and ecosystem values.

Recommendations for Modernising Regional Forest Agreements

1. The agreement must consider and aim to achieve broader value outcomes including increased synchronisation and contribution to ecosystem services, and other forest dependent industries such as tourism, public health and recreation, water and carbon outcomes.
2. Regular five year assessment reviews must be independent and actioned
3. Conservation of species, ecosystems and ecosystem services must be paramount and outcomes monitored and reported
4. The RFA apply for assessment and approval under the EPBC ACT as is required for other industry and works.
5. The impact of climate change on RFA areas and native species must be assessed, monitored and reported in all plans, including to the public
6. Cumulative impacts such as wildfire, drought and flood must be embedded into assessments and actions to protect conservation of species and ecosystem values
7. A landscape approach similar to that applied to Victoria’s Biodiversity Strategy 2017-2037 must be paramount and enacted
8. Strengthen management prescriptions for threatened species and climate change impacts
9. All research and investigations must be completed by independent and approved contractors, approved by DELWP and made publicly available.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Should you require more detailed information I can be contacted [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

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