

Submission to the review of the Western Victorian Regional Forest Agreement

7th July 2019

To whom it may concern,

I would firstly like to state how taken aback I was when I heard that the Western Victorian RFA was still in existence much less up for review.

As a person involved in campaigning against the practice of clearfell logging within our water catchments during the initial RFA consultations, I was under the very strong impression that the then Victorian Premier Steve Bracks had given a firm commitment to cancel it.

While I now understand this did not happen as promised, I see no reason it should not be now honoured as part of the current review of the Victorian RFAs.

The Western RFA has little reason to continue. It is my understanding that less than 2% of Victorian native timber products come from within its area and that the export market for native forest woodchip it was designed to protect/control has just about disappeared from the region.

However there is another overarching concern that is not picked up to any great extent within either the consultation paper nor the online resources supporting this review, namely the impact of clearfell logging on water catchment yield.

One of the significant drivers for the formation of the Greater Otway National Park was it offered protection for the water supply catchments of cities like Geelong. When the impact of clearfell logging on water yield became evident, and better understood within the community, there was widespread support to have the practice halted.

Now, 20 years further on, the impacts of climate change are being felt in Western Victoria. The East branch of the Barwon River dried out completely this season and the Barwon River itself stopped flowing for over 3 months at Winchelsea.

Recent calls for submissions to Barwon Water's Barwon Downs Borefield Licence attracted over 1100 submissions. The community is very aware that over extraction of ground water has caused significant impacts on rivers and streams within the boundary of the aquifer. Those which were 'gaining' or fed by groundwater became 'losing' streams. Strong campaigning on the ground has seen Barwon Water pull its licence renewal application for the foreseeable future.

This illustrates that water literacy has increased dramatically over the last 20 years. A renewed Western RFA would almost certainly activate those who are seeing their rivers and streams wither before their eyes. During the campaign fighting for a National Park in the Otways an economic case was put regarding the cost of foregone water due to clearfelling and that argument helped carry the day. The State's growing reliance on far more expensive desalinated water now makes that case far more robust.

However on top of this is the current plight of the rivers and streams being fed by the Otways and other forest areas. Climate change is being keenly felt within the region. Any further threat to the catchments which sustain those waterways along with their dependent ecosystems and those whose livelihood depend on them, will undoubtedly be heavily challenged.

The timber businesses and jobs within the area have shifted to a large degree to plantation timber. I see absolutely no value in extending an RFA which may in any way stall this continuing transition.

The protection of water supplies along with the long term future of the region's waterways and what they sustain needs to be given the highest priority in this decision.

Thank you.

Regards,

