

Victorian East Gippsland Regional Forest Agreement: Fact Sheet

3 February 1997

Background

The East Gippsland RFA is an agreement between Victoria and the Commonwealth that recognises the range of social, economic, environmental, conservation and heritage obligations that both governments have regarding the long term management and protection of forest values in East Gippsland. The RFA is intended to bring stability to the East Gippsland region by providing a positive environment for economic and employment growth in local communities, a sustainable resource base for industry, and ensuring the protection of Australia's biodiversity, old growth and wilderness through a CAR Reserve System and complementary off-reserve management.

The East Gippsland RFA will:

- establish a forest reserve system that meets the national reserve criteria and is based on thorough scientific assessment;
- ensure Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management across the East Gippsland forest estate through management plans, development of species recovery plans action statements and the implementation of codes of practice;
- remove the requirement for export woodchip licences for the RFA area; and
- last for 20 years and provide industry and conservation certainty which will be further supported by both governments pursuing complementary legislation.

The East Gippsland CAR Reserve System established by the RFA has three components:

- The **Dedicated Reserves (416,258ha)** or those established through State legislation for conservation purposes. (eg: National Parks, Flora and Fauna reserves).
- The **Informal Reserves (115,087ha)** are the larger elements of the Special Protection Zone within State forests. These elements are designed to protect identified conservation values. Timber harvesting is excluded and public review is a necessary component of any rezoning. These reserves allow flexibility to respond to new information or changes in the environment. Any changes require public scrutiny. To date, no such changes have occurred.
- Areas **Protected by Prescription**, those further elements of the SPZ (eg: Stream side buffers for water quality protection), and areas under special management regimes (eg: for particular species conservation management).

RFA has positive outcomes for East Gippsland communities through its potential to:

- increase employment;
- boost economic activity and regional vitality;
- increase the sense of social and economic security and wellbeing;
- secure existing services and develop new services particularly in the areas of health, education and childcare; and
- increase opportunities for recreation and tourism through the development of infrastructure associated with forest related industries.

The RFA is good for industry because it:

- provides greater certainty of access to timber resources over 20 years;
- provides a stimulus for investment which in turn will encourage value adding and create employment opportunities;
- will increase the productivity of forest harvesting operations; and
- reduces duplication in government processes.

The RFA promotes ecologically sustainable forest management by:

- ensuring that the whole of the forest estate is managed sustainably for the range of values, through regional conservation and production planning
- regional planning integrates the management of both reserved and production forests, and includes:
 - the development and monitoring of sustainability indicators;
 - the protection of areas containing specific values;
 - the implementation of codes of practice for harvesting and fire management;
 - setting priorities for the management of vegetation communities and endangered species;
 - setting out priorities for forest-related research;
 - setting guidelines for the management of cultural heritage values;
 - requiring the completion and publication of regional prescriptions for - timber production and management plans for the Comprehensive Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system; and
 - significantly improving the identification, protection and management of - the National Estate.

The RFA promotes the transparency and accountability of forest management with:

- five yearly reviews with public input to monitor progress under the RFA;
- public access to compliance reporting undertaken by Victoria;
- Victoria reaffirming its commitment to formal consultation, participation and negotiation with local Aboriginal groups;
- Victoria reaffirming its commitment to review pricing and allocation policies for government owned commercial forestry operations; and
- Victoria's continuing commitment to public involvement in reviews of the East Gippsland Forest Management Plan and Codes of Practice.