

Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management

Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM) is the management of forest on all land tenures to maintain the overall capacity of forests to provide goods, protect biodiversity, and protect the full suite of forest values at the regional level. One of the key objectives of each Regional Forest Agreement is to ensure that forests on and off reserves are managed sustainably.

The North East RFA systems and processes in the region were documented and evaluated to see how they compare with an independent assessment of Victoria's Statewide ESFM systems and processes.

The Statewide assessment was peer reviewed by Professor Ian Ferguson of the University of Melbourne, and found that Victoria had all the major elements for ESFM in place. Further improvements suggested were updating forest legislation, refining planning processes, integrating reserve and off-reserve management and increasing awareness of the importance of competition in determining price for timber resources. The Commonwealth and Victoria have addressed the suggestions with commitments in the East Gippsland and Central Highlands RFAs and have:

- established Parks Victoria to provide management services to the State for parks, reserves and other Crown land;
- established Forestry Victoria to enhance environmental accountability and an improved commercial focus for timber harvesting in State forests;
- completed regional prescriptions for timber production;
- published the Biodiversity Strategy (previously referred to as the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Strategy);
- published the internal audit of the compliance with the Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production for 1997;
- published Guidelines for the Management of Cultural Heritage Values in Forests, Parks and Reserves;
- completed the Statewide Forest Resource Inventory for the North East;
- completed and prepared a report on a pilot program to trial the accreditation of forestry professionals relating to planning for forest operations on private land.

The RFA provisions are described overleaf

The RFA provides for:

- development and monitoring of sustainability indicators
- publishing future reports of audits of compliance with the Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production
- implementing a continuing quality assurance program within three years
- publishing of regional prescriptions for timber production, the Central Highlands Forest Management Plan and management plans for National and State Parks by the end of 1998
- the development of Statewide guidelines for the Management of Cultural Heritage Values in Forests, Parks and Reserves
- encouraging private forest owners to comply with the Code of Forest Practice for Timber Production
- research priorities and priorities for the management of vegetation communities and endangered species
- Victoria's completion of a review of pricing and allocation policies for government owned commercial forestry operations.

Victoria is preparing a Forest Management Plan for the North East region with assistance from a Forest Management Advisory Committee, which is due for completion by June 2000. A proposed Forest Management Plan was released concurrently with the North East RFA Directions Report for public comment. When completed, the plan will make an important contribution to achieving ESFM principles in the region along with other commitments in the North East Regional Forest Agreement.