

# Environment and Heritage

The Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA) for the West RFA region included projects to assess the biodiversity, old-growth, wilderness and heritage values of the region's native forests. Volume One of the CRA report covers many aspects of the region's biodiversity values, and further environmental assessments will be included in a second volume to be published in September.

## **The CAR Reserve System**

The environmental values of the region will be protected in a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve system and through the ecologically sustainable management of forests. The CAR Reserve system will be based nationally agreed criteria for the protection of biodiversity, old-growth and wilderness.

## **Biodiversity**

The biodiversity assessment for the West RFA region includes analyses of information about forest ecosystems, flora and fauna species and their habitats. Potential threats to these values in the region are also described. An analysis has been conducted to determine the extent of vegetation depletion since European settlement.

Volume One of the CRA report contains information about Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) for the Midlands and Otway Forest Management Areas (FMAs) within the West region. EVC information for the portion of the region within the Portland and Horsham FMAs will be made available in Volume Two of the report. Descriptions of the EVCs and more detailed biodiversity data will form part of a biodiversity technical report that is in production and which will be progressively made available from the RFA web-site.

## **Biodiversity in the Midlands and Otways**

Ninety six ecological vegetation classes were identified in the Midlands and Otways area, 20 of which are mainly on private land, with the remaining 76 occurring mainly on public land. For the 22 EVCs that are not considered endangered, vulnerable or rare, the national reserve criteria reservation target of 15 per cent of the pre-1750 extent has been met for all but six. These are: Lowland Forest, Riparian Forest, Heathy Dry Forest, Grassy Dry Forest, Sedgy Riparian Woodland, and Stream-bank Shrubland.

For many of the 74 EVCs that are endangered, vulnerable or rare, the only occurrence outside conservation reserves is on private land, reflecting the historic patterns of clearing.

## **Fauna**

The CRA includes information about 42 species of terrestrial fauna in the region considered high priority either because their long-term survival is threatened in some way, or because they are considered to be good indicator species. Examples of the priority species are Spot-tailed Quoll, Eastern Bent-wing Bat, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Regent Honeyeater, Barking Owl, Anglesea Mountain Dragon and Warty Bell Frog.

The species considered most at risk are those that have a small geographic range, low abundance, a narrow habitat specificity and are particularly vulnerable to disturbances like wildfire. Five species – the Smoky Mouse, Heath Mouse, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Rufous Bristlebird, and Anglesea Mountain Dragon fall into this category.

The report provides an analysis of the impacts of a wide range of potentially threatening processes on all priority fauna species. The threatening processes considered include such activities as clearance of native vegetation, timber harvesting and fuel reduction burning.

There are 12 species for which less than 20 per cent of records are in conservation reserves, two of which, the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and the Striped Worm Lizard, are found mainly in the West RFA region.

## **Aquatic fauna**

Twenty-one native freshwater fish species were recorded from surveys conducted across the West region. In all, 471 sites were surveyed for the RFA covering a wide spectrum of land tenures, including private land, State Forest, reserves and other public land, such as stream frontages. Ten of the species are listed as threatened fauna in Victoria including the Dwarf Galaxias, Variegated Pygmy Perch and Australian Mudfish.

## **Flora**

Analyses of the flora species of the region will be presented in Volume Two of the CRA report.