



# 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 West Victoria 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 other Victorian RFAs and have:

- reviewed and amended the Commonwealth legislation dealing with the environment;
- 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;
- published the internal audit of the compliance with the Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production for 1997 and 1998;
- published Guidelines for the Management of Cultural Heritage Values in Forests, Parks and Reserves for East Gippsland;
- 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:

- implementation of the Integrated Forest Planning System and the Statewide Forest Resource Inventory
- development and monitoring of sustainability indicators
- publishing future reports of audits of compliance with the Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production
- implementing an ongoing quality assurance program
- 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 for the management of vegetation communities and endangered species

## **Water**

Concerns have been raised about the impact of timber harvesting activities on water quality and yield in the West RFA region. The provision of adequate flows of high quality surface water and maintenance of groundwater processes is a fundamental goal of forest management.

As part of the Forest Management System, Victoria proposes to conduct hydrological research on the impacts of timber harvesting on water quality and yield. Victoria will develop a project brief for this research, which will include the Otway Ranges, in consultation with industry and community stakeholders, by 30 June 2000.

Both the Otway and Midlands Forest Management Plans address water supply issues in greater detail. In each Plan, a range of measures has been established for domestic water supply catchments. They exceed the minimum requirements of the Code of Forest Practices, including limitations on the area and proportion of catchments to be harvested over time, seasonal restrictions on harvesting and more restrictive slope limits for timber harvesting.

The effectiveness of these measures to manage water quality and yield and the applicability of any new information or research will be considered when the Otway and Midlands FMPs are reviewed or updated.