

MODERNISATION OF VICTORIA'S REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENTS AND FOREST MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

ENVIRONMENTAL NGOs

Participant summary notes - What are some key messages and insights from your discussion topics?

The opinions expressed in these notes do not represent the views of Government. This report was written by the organisations in attendance at the round tables and captures the key points of discussion, as determined by the participants. It does not represent the views of all Environmental NGOs, nor does it comprehensively capture the full range of views and perspectives of those present. The matters raised here as part of each discussion topic do not represent the complete information or view on each discussion topic, theme or issue.

3 & 26 October 2018

3 October 2018

Organisations attended

Goongerah Environment Centre
MyEnvironment
Otway Ranges Environment Network
Rubicon Forest Protection Group
Strathbogrie Sustainable Forest Group
The Wilderness Society
Victorian National Parks Association
Wildlife of the Central Highlands
Wombat Forestcare
Wye River Action Group

Other organisations invited

Australian Conservation Foundation
Birdlife Australia
Environment East Gippsland
Environment Victoria

In attendance

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (Vic)
Department of the Environment and Climate Change (Cth)

26 October 2018

Organisations attended

Australian Conservation Foundation
Field Naturalists Club of Victoria
Rubicon Forest Protection Group
Goongerah Environment Centre
MyEnvironment
Strathbogrie Sustainable Forest Group
The Wilderness Society
Wildlife of the Central Highlands
Wye River Action Group

Other organisations invited

Birdlife Australia
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General Discussion

The Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) have categorically failed to achieve their intended outcomes of providing for conservation and security for the industry. As such, they should not be renewed, but instead be allowed to expire.

Logging must be made subject to the EPBC Act or equivalent future national law.

However, if RFAs or similar forest management arrangements are to be put in place, there are significant, fundamental changes that would need to be made to avoid the same failures of the last 20 years. Whatever comes next must not repeat the 20-year set and forget mistakes.

The absence of formal review is an unacceptable starting point. A formal review would provide guidance for what works, and what does not with such a framework.

An evaluation of long-term viability (and the relevance and usefulness) of producing new agreements / forest management arrangements is required.

To progress the RFA modernisation process with legitimacy and authority, the baseline data on the forest estate must be available for effective 'modernisation'. The condition of the forests - as well as the RFAs themselves - must be thoroughly and independently assessed. Decisions must be based on credible, peer-reviewed science.

For this process to have credibility a moratorium on logging must be instated. A moratorium on logging is required to not prejudice or pre-determine outcomes.

Discussion was had about the Victorian Government Principles as provided in the handout - where were these derived? Who developed them? What interests do they serve? (For example, increased regulatory certainty is intended for what or whom?) Why is legislative and regulatory review already apparently locked in as part of the renewal? How has this been determined in absence of any review of the RFAs themselves, the conditions in which they were signed, and the social, economic and environmental conditions of the forests, the industry and communities today. In other words, the condition of the forests - as well as the RFAs themselves - must be thoroughly and independently assessed.

Clarification was sought by the eNGOs about the role of Traditional Owners as partners in this process.

NB The numbers allocated to themes and discussion items, and the bulleted points below, do not represent any order of priority of issue or concern.

Discussion Theme No. 1 - Fire, Climate Change, Carbon, Other Ecosystem Services, Sustainable Yield

What is it about this theme that could shift the Regional Forest Agreement process to deliver good results for Victoria’s forests?

The above question was posed for discussion by ENGOs for discussion about the theme No. 1 – Fire, Climate Change, Carbon, Other Ecosystem Services, Sustainable Yield

1. Fire
<p>a) RFAs must enable adaptive management to respond to impacts of bushfires on sustainable yield and manage sovereign risks (e.g. not replicate the sovereign risks such as the supply commitments in the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996. Commercial contracts create management conflicts when bushfires impact on [reduce] timber resources. VicForests changed some wood supply contracts, but changes haven’t been applied to Australian Paper contracts. eNGOS recommend process leaders and managers refer Victorian Forest Industry Taskforce information: Fire and VicForests modelling and oral presentation by VicForests.</p>
<p>b) Timeframes for management regimes need flexibility and adaptability to account for different fire scenarios and wood contracts should be suspended if needed.</p>
<p>c) The CAR reserve system should be more contiguous to help mitigate the impacts of fires and protect fire refugia across the landscape.</p>
<p>d) If there is to be any logging of fire refugia in areas that have had large scale fire events, it must be subject to appropriate scientific and legal approvals, and have limits set on the area of unburnt forest logged in fire affected landscapes, such as refugia left after Black Saturday.</p>
<p>e) The understorey is being ignored in regeneration burns.</p>

2. Climate change

- a) Our forests have a great ability to store carbon. Protecting and restoring forests is a key approach to climate change mitigation. The 2018 IPCC report warned that we have 12 years to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C. Forests have been predicted by the world's best scientists to contribute ~18% to the emissions reductions required to limit warming to 1.5°C.
- b) Climate change is shifting how and where forest types can grow, including their primary productivity, logging hasn't taken this into account.
- c) Climate change must be factored into long term threatened species impacts and responses to logging, as well as future water yield and carbon sequestration.

3. Carbon, and other ecosystems services

- a) Regional Forest Agreements must consider carbon markets and other ecosystem services.
- b) Logging should be considered against the value of ecosystems services.
- c) This process should utilise the SEEA framework for measuring ecosystem services and values.
- d) Airsheds should be included as part of future consideration in forestry based planned burning.

<p>e) The RFAs should reflect possible investment opportunities for carbon sequestration in forests and identify what schemes are available. ENGOs recommend process managers and leaders refer Forest Industry Taskforce agreements and material, including ministerial correspondence, about carbon methods for native forests.</p>
<p>f) Forest values assessments should investigate the social wellbeing and economic opportunities associated with removing logging from the landscape. If and when referring to or building on any previous economic analysis, be wary the multipliers used therein.</p>
<p>g) Future forest management arrangements must take notice of understorey species, inclusive of forest composition and species at a detailed level.</p>
<p>h) Existing RFA regions are too large for the analysis of ecosystem services values. Interim Bioregionalisation of Australia (IBRA) sub-regions are preferable.</p>
<p>i) Any carbon price needs to be indexed and applied annually/daily rather than a fixed rate for the duration of the RFA.</p>
<p>j) Need to include any smoke from regeneration burns as industrial pollution, consider health impacts as well.</p>

<p>4. Sustainable Yield</p>
<p>a) Sustainable yield does not exist. Sustainable supply is based on sawlogs, not pulp, but it is pulped.</p>
<p>b) Sustainable yield needs to account for the Code of Practice Provisions, the extent of age class cohorts, what local areas can sustain, fire, climate change,</p>

<p>rotation length and economic availability.</p>
<p>c) Current sustainable yield calculations are severely overestimated. This needs to be looked at before you can go on with this RFA process. For example, the sustainable yield arrived at in a report for western Victoria was a massive over-estimation. Historically the sustainable yield has been over-estimated and as in western Victoria this is likely to apply to the rest of the state.</p>
<p>d) RFAs should establish the land base (i.e. CAR reserve system) and forest management system for determining operating rules. The RFAs should not specify annual sustainable yield amounts (i.e. cubic metres of sawlogs) for a 20-year period, as things change (e.g. major bushfires).</p>
<p>e) Contracts drive harvesting. Volumes are dictated in part by the lease costs of heavy machinery. Repayments mean logging must occur. That is in turn linked to having to pull out certain amounts of wood to feed the Australian Paper contracts.</p>
<p>f) Sawlogs volumes are not based on sustainable yield they are based on the minimum volumes of sawlog required to come out of the forests to satisfy the pulp log contracts. Refer to page 39 of the VEAC Wood and Fire Supply Report.</p>
<p>g) The Forest Industry Taskforce clearly agreed that business as usual for the native forest timber industry is unviable. This RFA process must take that into account.</p>
<p>h) The existing approach to calculating sustainable yield is faulty because it does not include pulp wood – needs to include pulp in this (ratio can be 4:1 of pulp log to sawlog or even greater).</p>
<p>i) Sustainable yield needs to be calculated based on what the forest can provide.</p>

j) The West Victoria RFA shouldn't be going on into the future. The intent and purpose of the West Victoria RFA has shifted away from first intentions. Since the West Victoria RFA was signed on the 31 March 2000, dramatic shifts have occurred due to broad based opposition to woodchipping and clearfell logging in the community. Much of the public land covered by the West Victoria RFA has now been made into legislated nature conservation reserves unavailable for logging. As of 2005, all public land in the Otway Forest Management Forest Management Area (FMA) is now some form of nature conservation reserve made up of National Parks, Forest Parks and flora reserves. In the Portland FMA, much public land has been converted into either National Park or Forest Park. VicForests does some resource management, but not much. There is no export woodchipping from the West Victoria RFA.

These changes – the absence of export wood chipping and the massive cut to logging access on public land - have yet to be formally acknowledged in the West Victoria RFA. The West Victoria RFA ought to be rescinded in line with the recommendations of the five-yearly review.

k) The Allocation Order currently specifies 5 yearly harvest limits. If the current legal framework is to continue, ecological sustainability criteria require returning it to more forest types and by local areas. Recent mega-fires and past over-logging means forest age structure is highly unbalanced and planned future logging and climate change/higher severe bushfire risk means that that the way harvest area limits are calculated and specified needs deep review. It should not be 'available area' divided by notional rotation length. Ecologically catastrophic decisions are being made. The forests are way off harvest age. The way that harvested area is calculated needs review and should not be area divided by rotation length without consideration of the impacts of bushfire.

l) Governments have supposed to have been doing adaptive management since inception of the RFAs. This is not happened and is still not happening, and won't happen if this process does not review the sustained yield.

The following questions were raised as part of the discussion on this theme:

- How will this process understand sustained and sustainable yields?
- How will sustainable yield be set, if not through the Regional Forest Agreements?

- How will Regional Forest Agreements consider emerging carbon markets and other ecosystem services? Will they evaluate the cost of logging against the value of these ecosystem services?
- How will the proposed 20-year Regional Forest Agreement period adequately project fire and climate change scenarios and build in necessary flexibility?
- How can Regional Forest Agreements truly account for the impacts of climate change and be part of the solution to mitigating climate change?
- Where is the policy setting that suggests sawlog is the priority over pulp?
- Does RFA sustainable yield capture the impact/effects of Wood Pulp Agreement Act 1996? The system yield is faulty because it does not include pulp wood – needs to include pulp in this (ratio can be 4 to 1 or even greater).
- Sustainable versus sustained yield? What can the forest provide?

Discussion Theme No. 2 - Social license, Certification, Regional Economies, Transition, Process

What is it about this theme that could shift the Regional Forest Agreement process to deliver good results for Victoria's Forests?

The above question was posed for discussion by ENGOs for discussion about the theme No. 2 – Social license, Certification, Regional Economies, Transition, Process

1. Social license

- a) Social license is connected to responsible behavior, past irresponsible actions have eroded social license of the logging industry in Victoria.

Achieving improved social license and certification under a Regional Forest Agreement is impossible due to the exemption from the *Environmental Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999*.

- b) Forest Stewardship Certification has higher environmental, social and economic standards than Regional Forest Agreements – this lower Regional Forest Agreement standard constrains the degree to which social license can be improved.

2. Certification

- a) The Victorian Auditor General has stated that the Australian Forestry Standard is insufficient.

3. Regional Economies

- a) A disproportionate amount of wood, and therefore jobs are concentrated in the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement area. These regions need sustainable alternatives. The flipside is that proportionately fewer jobs are

found in the other four RFA regions.
b) The impacts of logging on tourism and other important income sources for regional economies must be quantified, with reimbursement if logging proceeds.
c) Intensive widescale clear felling is destroying the recreational and tourist values/potential of native forests. Tourist development has greater economic potential than highly mechanised and centralised timber harvesting and processing.
d) Must establish a credible methodology for quantifying the economic loss to local communities that is incorporated along with water and carbon monetary losses which VicForests must pay for if they log.
e) The government purchase of Heyfield sawmill and the associated losses of contracts by the smaller mills is having regional impacts.
f) Innovations in timber milling and timber manufacture need to be supported.

4. Transition
a) The timber industry is failing to plan for its own transition.
b) Regional Forest Agreements should adequately facilitate the transition from native forest to plantations.
c) There should be pay outs for loggers and sawmills.

<p>d) Regional Forest Agreements should support diversification of the timber industry. There is a need to think differently, consider new technologies, high quality timber and other options. This is a neglected area with research abandoned in this space. It needs leadership.</p>
<p>e) Need to consider the opportunity for small diameter plantation wood to be re-engineered.</p>
<p>f) Sawlogs must be the priority over pulp.</p>
<p>g) Regional Forest Agreements should provide regulatory certainty for, and encourage expansion, of the plantation sector.</p>
<p>h) The Victorian Government has committed \$110 m to invest in plantations but there are no policy settings to guide what this investment should be in.</p>
<p>i) To facilitate plantations will require guaranteed access to good well-watered land close to processing facilities, including managing local opposition to reduced stream flows (may require regulatory action) and support in accessing long term capital (may require tax concessions but beware the MIS debacle).</p>
<p>j) Opportunities to encourage expansion of plantations, and address barriers (e.g. land use issues, water use issues, regulations etc.) need to be explored through this process.</p>
<p>k) Is it worthwhile having Regional Forest Agreements given the non-viability of the native forest timber industry?</p>
<p>l) How do RFAs impact on plantations, do they remove export controls? Is there a useful role for RFAs around plantations?</p>

5. Process

a) This process, including the updating of scientific information, without having a credible Scientific Advisory Committee to oversee the process is flawed.

b) Rolling over, extending or otherwise continuing with Regional Forest Agreements ignores external factors, such as changing markets (including prices), consumer demand and new materials (such a steel frames in houses, alternative fibre for paper and manufactured pine).

c) Regional Forest Agreements haven't been reviewed in terms of their aims. While reviews of implementation have taken place (for example the third five yearly review of Victoria's Regional Forest Agreements), they are consistently three or more years late and do not have criteria (or standards) that demonstrate the degree to which a milestone was or wasn't achieved. These reviews are simply about implementation and do not examine whether the legislated goals have been achieved, such as the requirement for the ecologically sustainable management of forests.

d) When implementation reviews of Regional Forest Agreements do occur, updates or amendments based on the findings of the reviews are not undertaken to reflect latest scientific understanding, community views and/or market factors. The review process is not acknowledging the wishes of regional communities. For example, prior to 2017 seventeen local councils had passed motions to cease logging because of the majority opinions of their constituents. Since then more councils have come out against logging, including where logging is occurring or scheduled to occur near Mirboo North and in the Strathbogie Ranges.

e) Lack of Review in the strategic plan for the RFA Modernisation Program is deeply problematic - you have only Assess, Engage and Renew - where is the REVIEW?

<p>f) This process needs to draw on the various reports from the Forest Industry Taskforce.</p>
<p>g) Commencement of various ‘assessments’ before the independent scientific advisory panel is established is deeply problematic and raises credibility issues.</p>
<p>h) DELWP’s proposal to provide ‘regulatory certainty’ through this modernisation process is worrying. Regulatory certainty almost always means providing certainty to industry and weakens environmental protections. Any regulatory changes must strengthen environmental protections.</p>
<p>i) There is a lack of clarity regarding intermediate outputs of the RFA Modernisation Program (scientific advice, assessment results, etc) and consultation opportunities around those outputs.</p>
<p>j) DELWP ignore Scientific Advisory Committee recommendations (for example logging in greater glider habitat). This cannot be allowed to continue.</p>
<p>k) Regulatory changes to environmental protections and prescriptions need to be considered in light of the substantial and ongoing economic and wood supply realities the industry is experiencing. Given the current review into DELWP’s approach to regulation of logging and their systemic failure to satisfactorily fulfil their regulatory role, it is inappropriate to be discussing this issue at this time with DELWP.</p>

The following questions were raised as part of the discussion on this theme:

- Given the Regional Forest Agreements themselves apparently aren’t being reviewed, on what basis can they be renewed?

Discussion Theme No. 3 - Threatened species, EPBC Act exemption, Water catchments, Science

What is it about this theme that could shift the Regional Forest Agreement process to deliver good results for Victoria's Forests?

The above question was posed for discussion by ENGOs for discussion about the theme No. 3 – Threatened Species, EPBC Act Exemption, Water catchments, Science.

1. Threatened Species
<p>a) Current practices, including the exemption from <i>Environmental Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999</i>, is in contradiction to the Precautionary Principle which must be a central guiding principle in any modernised agreement.</p> <p>Multiple extinction risks highlight the importance of complying with the Precautionary Principle.</p>
<p>b) Current conservation requirements of Federal and State listed forest-dependent species must be assessed both in terms of reserves required (including critical habitats) and off reserve prescriptions (including prescriptions based on detections in logging areas).</p>
<p>c) Depleted vegetation types need to be adequately considered. Definitions for these vegetation types in the east of the State can be irrelevant to the west (e.g. wet gullies instead of rainforest). A different suite of definitions is needed in the west of the State.</p>
<p>d) Clearer definitions of old growth and rainforest are required. The current definitions are problematic.</p> <p>Antiquated definitions and systems currently used in the RFAs need to be updated to reflect the best available science and knowledge. The definitions of Old Growth forest and rainforest in the Code of Practice need to be updated to be consistent with ecological definitions, and not commercial definitions, especially if they are to effectively protect these rare and diminishing forest</p>

types. Old growth forest and rainforest, particularly in East Gippsland, are often not defined as old growth and rainforest under the narrow Code definitions. Definitions need to be broadened to better reflect and represent old growth and rainforest values. The criteria used to establish the Comprehensive, Adequate, Representative (CAR) reserve system is over 20 years old and does not adhere to the most up-to-date biodiversity criteria agreed upon by the Commonwealth and State governments.

e) The RFAs need to update criteria to provide protections beyond those afforded by the JANIS criteria.

f) Decisions regarding logging in threatened species habitat must be made by an independent scientific advisory committee.

g) Forests can't be effectively restored post-logging, especially considering the impacts of climate change.

Logging across the landscape makes fire recovery even harder, especially for species such as ferns (as they are more dependent on water). The timing of regeneration fires has a massive impact on regeneration efforts as well. Salvage logging post-fire events can be even more destructive.

h) Threatened Species Recovery Plans aren't being developed for the high-profile species, let alone for the low-profile species (such as invertebrates) or habitats.

i) The Victorian Government Scientific Advisory Committee needs to do more than advise; they should be provided with powers to make actions binding and give final approval of any science-based decisions.

j) Firewood collection is destroying food sources for invertebrates. Should logging continue, greater use of the wood left after logging is completed for community firewood, rather than being burnt during 'regeneration burns', would help alleviate this.

2. Environmental Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act Exemption

- a) The native forest logging industry's exemption from the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* must end.
- b) The *Environmental Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999* exemption is based on the Victorian regulatory system being adequate. However, the Victorian system is so flawed, that the Federal Government should reconsider the Victorian exemption as it has clearly failed its role.
- c) A review of the performance of the existing RFAs is required. It is impossible to establish a pathway forward without an understanding of what failed and what worked over the last 20 years.

3. Water catchments

- a) We all need water, including local governments.

The science is incontrovertible that logging leads to decreased water yields and lower water quality. Government continues to ignore this advice. The impacts of lower water yield should be considered against the price of replacing this water. VicForests must pay for any water loss incurred by logging activities, price must be indexed.
- b) We need to know what the price of water is (e.g. Melbourne Water commercial or domestic rate) so we can calculate the monetary value of water lost each year. Price increases should be applied annually/quarterly. A rate that stays the same for the next 20 years is not acceptable. And today's rate must not be set for the life of the rotation.

4. Science

a) Forest policy must be informed by science, and Government can't continue to ignore incontrovertible scientific advice.

b) Victoria is losing diversity under the current overly simplistic management definitions of forests. Victoria's forests need a biological description of forests that accounts for their complexity.

Forests are complex, dynamic and fragile ecosystems of interdependent lifeforms, including plants, fungi, animals, micro-organisms (with differing lifeforms each containing a range of diverse genetic material).

c) The current management approach means we are losing things (such as rare plants and animals) before we even know they are there.

d) There should be a greater use of, and acknowledgement of and respect for citizen science, including by and from the Government.

The following questions were raised as part of the discussion on this theme:

- Why would EPBC Act exemptions continue in light of timber harvesting impacts?
- Why does the Government arguably keep ignoring science?
- Will Regional Forest Agreements be renewed in March 2020 regardless of the stage the renew process is at?
- What review triggers will be built into future Regional Forest Agreements?

Discussion Question No. 1

For Regional Forest Agreements to be truly responsive, adaptive and modern, what would they be based on, what would their purpose be, and what would they achieve?

The above question was posed for discussion by ENGOs.

<i>What would Regional Forest Agreements be based on?</i>
<p>a) For Regional Forest Agreements to be truly responsive, adaptive and modern they must be based on science that is independent, peer-reviewed, adequate (in that it addresses all known factors), accurate and up-to-date. The findings or conclusions of this work must be reflected in the actual implementation of the Regional Forest Agreements.</p> <p>To ensure this is effectively undertaken an independent and credible scientific panel must be appointed to oversee the process.</p>
<p>b) Responsive, adaptive and modern Regional Forest Agreements should have regard to a multitude of values of other ecosystem services – these values need to be explicitly stated to underpin the Regional Forest Agreements and when impacted on by logging compensation must be paid.</p>
<p>c) Regional Forest Agreements need to be inclusive and truly represent community needs and wants. They need to be driven by and responsive to widespread community input.</p>
<p>d) There needs to be clear structures of accountability that ensure compliance with national environment law.</p>
<p>e) To be adaptive and responsive, Regional Forest Agreements need to incorporate a multi-layered review process that is frequent, rigorous and substantial. Triggers for review should be embedded based on events, concerns and changes, as well as a system of spot audits. These should be publicly reported and actionable.</p>

- f) Regional Forest Agreements need to be based on sound economics and be rewritten to serve the full spectrum of forest-dependent businesses and industries.

What would Regional Forest Agreements' purpose be?

- a) For Regional Forest Agreements to be truly modern, they must include the development and implementation of a plan to transition to plantations.
- b) Regional Forest Agreements must manage and protect forests and their values (including biodiversity) for all users.

What would Regional Forest Agreements achieve?

- a) They should be structured to provide genuine, measurable conservation outcomes that result in an overall improvement in conservation management and forest value.
- b) They must enable a smooth transition for industry from native timber harvesting to sustainable regulated plantations.
- c) They need to provide for good socio-economic outcomes for regional Victoria.
- d) There will be greater certainty for persistence of threatened species in the wild because logging would be subject to EPBC Act requirements. By removing the exemption, it would put logging on a level playing field to other extractive industries.

Discussion Question No. 2

How should Regional Forest Agreements respond to, and prepare for, the impacts of climate change and bushfires?

The above question was posed for discussion by ENGOs.

<i>How should Regional Forest Agreements respond to, and prepare for, the impacts of climate change and bushfires?</i>
<p>a) Should get legal advice about whether new provisions could be included in the RFAs to enable the Victorian Government to enact force majeure to manage sovereign risk (legislated wood pulp agreement) if there are insufficient timber resources to meet timber supply commitments (i.e. due to climate change, bushfires).</p>
<p>b) Regional Forest Agreements require climate change and bushfire responsiveness through ensuring the use of adequate, peer-reviewed science and ensuring the scientific advisory panel informs and enforces adaptive responses and transparency in legally binding ways.</p> <p>Rainfall and temperature measures can be used as triggers for review as part of Regional Forest Agreements including indicators for climate change and bushfires.</p>
<p>c) They should be designed to manage native forests for resilience, embedding the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. consideration of carbon sequestration, water and plantation planningii. the precautionary principle
<p>d) Regional Forest Agreements should allow for the management of uncertainty and to anticipate and specify outcomes and their likelihood.</p> <p>They should contain mechanisms to demonstrate and implement risk mitigation of likely outcomes. This is incompatible with the current 20-year length of agreements.</p>

e) Threat impacts should be addressed by the expansion of the CAR reserve system and reduction of forest fragmentation.
f) Regional Forest Agreements should contain in-built review triggers to suspend and reassess harvesting when resource is impacted by fire or extreme weather events and on detection of threatened species. They should incorporate a post-fire assessment and moratorium on activity.
g) The Regional Forest Agreements should contain a plan to transition out of native forests to prevent conversion of native forests to plantations.

Discussion Question No. 3

What would Regional Forest Agreements, based on credible, peer-reviewed science look like?

The above question was posed for discussion by ENGOs.

<i>What would Regional Forest Agreements, based on credible, peer-reviewed science look like?</i>
a) Regional Forest Agreements would contain the most up-to-date science and embed a process to be adaptive and resilient to new science as it comes to hand. The 5 yearly reviews and State of the Forest Reports would be more inclusive of new science. New reviews would be triggered by changing circumstances. An independent scientific panel would conduct monitoring, re-testing and approval.
b) They would incorporate clearly measurable indicators, reinforced by monitoring and consistent between regions and timeframes. The indicators would be enforceable with clear public lines of accountability and meaningful sanctions. They should embed the precautionary principle.

c) They would fully incorporate the broader range of values across climate change, fire management, biodiversity, timber harvesting and water.
d) They would support conserving and protecting biodiversity and include targeted species assessments.
e) They would support transitioning out of native forest logging and support non-extractive uses of native forests.
f) It would frequently incorporate community-based input and review.
g) They would contain a trigger to suspend and terminate them at any stage.
h) They would be compliant with national environment law.

Check out Question

The question below was posed by ENGOs and answered anonymously by all workshop attendees, including state and Commonwealth departmental staff.

<i>What needs to shift for this Regional Forest Agreement process to deliver good outcomes for forests?</i>
<p>In no order of priority, we need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater understanding of the full range of environmental, social, economic and cultural values in Victoria's forests. • Constructive ongoing dialogue and consultation. • To listen to peer-reviewed science and economics so forest values which are the most valuable are the ones the forests are managed for. • A substantive increase in cognitive and emotional understanding of our forests by

politicians, bureaucracies and communities.

- A fully independent scientific panel that has the final say on any issues determined by science (e.g. threatened species, sustainable yield, water and logging in fire affected landscapes).
- Comprehensive, informed public involvement through all phases and at all levels of the process.
- To critically examine the continuation of pre-ordained outcomes, including the *Environmental Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999* exemption.
- To rescind and abandon the *Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996*.
- To end the public subsidisation of native forest logging.
- A greater focus on the multiple values of our forests.
- Government policy to transition the native logging industry to plantations.
- A shift in the pro-logging, anti-conservation culture within the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.
- The pulp volume to be accounted for under the sustainable yield.
- A system that is less vulnerable to political and industry interference.
- Political will.
- To base the process on good science, evidence and not lobbying by commercial vested interests.
- Detailed knowledge of the multiple and interacting effects of climate change on forest ecosystems, including understory components, which is then integrated into forest management.
- Courage to do what is right, even if it is hard.