

I would argue **against the renewal of Regional Forest Agreements in Victoria** and I don't foresee that modernised versions could serve us any better than the originals under which our forests have suffered for 20 years. Their basis is flawed in that no industry should be exempted from environmental protection laws. And certainly not one as unsustainable and reckless as the timber industry as monitored by Vicforests. It is a disastrous contradiction in terms that RFAs are agreements to log our native forests without the need for assessment of threatened species or natural heritage under national environment protection laws. None of the Victorian RFAs have met their objectives. Numbers of forest-dependent species listed as threatened continue to rise, and forest health is declining and will only get worse under climate change. Even the native forest industry is stagnating and in decline as their main resource runs out or is reduced through climate change and fire.

It has been suggested that logging under RFAs protects the environment through the establishment of parks and reserves. But there is very little substance in this. The RFA process has had little to do with the establishment of new national parks and reserves in Victoria, and has been a block rather than an impetus to the creation of protected areas.

In brief and in sum, the RFAs have damaged rather than protected Victoria's native forests and our environment because:

The RFAs did not lead to establishment of Victoria's reserve system. Most of it was a result of the National Parks Act.

The RFAs ignore key criteria in national agreed policy for formal protection.

The RFAs are a block to better protection and new national parks. The formal creation of national parks in the last decade is the lowest of the last 50–60 years.

The RFAs ecological criteria are outdated and inconsistent.

The RFA review fails to recognise that there are still significant gaps in Victoria's reserve system. Other state government policy clearly states that there is a gap of over 2 million hectares in the formal reserve system in Victoria. The RFA review does not adequately address the gaps in the reserve system. It is in contrast to the stated objectives in the Victorian Government's Biodiversity 2037 strategy.

The RFAs ignore climate change effects now and in the future. This is in addition to loss and fragmentation of habitat associated with land clearing, redistribution of water resources, changes in nutrient distributions in soil and water, changes in fire regimes, mining and salinity as well as the introduction of exotic species and diseases

The RFAs ignore the impacts of bushfires, past and future.

The RFAs ignore the other values we get from forests. Forest should be managed for multiple values, which can be done without RFAs as in many other parts of the state. Examples are water catchment, water for the environment, water quality, bee protection and honey production, mitigation of climate change, tourism and recreation.

The National Parks Act in Victoria provides for park planning. Logging is not allowed in areas protected under the National Parks Act. The RFAs and so-called forest planning have no sustainable or effective role and are a duplication of existing or future national park planning processes, and are likely to create conflicting objectives.

It is being acknowledged that Australia has an extinction problem. Many areas of native forest are still being logged without sufficient regard to the biodiversity loss caused, and some of our iconic native animals and plants are perilously close to disappearing for good. It must be time to take a different approach to forests.