

As a result the hardwood sawlog and forest woodchip industries ceased operations in the Otway region. It is understood that in the West Victoria RFA region only one hardwood saw mill continues to operate.

Proposed amended RFA for West Victoria

This leads to the question of relevance. That is, can an amended RFA for West Victoria, based on conditions that no longer exist, provide meaningful input in to the management of forests in West Victoria.

Clearly, the only main input/support that is required for the effective management of the park/reserve system and forested areas, such as the Otway Forest Park from which minor produce such as firewood can be extracted, is conservation oriented management This management should include, but not be limited to:

- Control of minor produce extraction.
- Control of off road visitors to forested areas such as trail bike riders, SUV drivers etc. that disturb wildlife, cause soil erosion and damage to vegetation etc.
- Weed control. Both within forests and adjoining land.
- Feral animal control.
- Coping with increased visitor numbers to sight seeing venues and other visitor attractions.
- Control of rubbish pollution.

Currently there are numerous instances of under performance when considering the above controls. For instance:

- The threat of weeds is very poorly controlled by DWELP. The spread of weeds in forests usually results from weed infestations outside the forest, which migrate to the forest. Weeds such as ragwort, thistles and blackberries are rampant in many parts of the Otways. Ragwort, spear thistles are prevalent along the coast (Great Ocean Walk), inland on pastures, VicRoad road easements, etc, next to forests on Crown Land (National Park and Forest Park). The enforcement of existing regulations by DWELP would go a long way towards controlling weeds on freehold land and reduce forest weed invasions, which would be easier to control.
- The control of off road vehicles is ineffective resulting in massive soil erosion, spread of disease and other problems.

In addition to the above, research is required to prepare and implement informed plans to mitigate the impacts of Climate Change, which are aimed at protecting the existing flora and fauna from increased stresses that will occur with the progression of Climate Change.

With the exception of the Climate Change research, none of the above is directly relevant to timber harvesting.

During the public meeting at Forest, it became clear that any funding or other support from the Federal Government would not be region centric. In other words, it is left to

the State Government authorities to allocate funding and other support measures as it sees fit. As the logging vs. conservation issues in the West Victoria RFA have been settled, the identification of areas that require flora and fauna protection only remains in the other 4 RFA regions in Victoria. The same applies to the identification of areas that are available to the timber industry for harvesting, and the need to ensure its viability. It is therefore logical to assume that these areas will receive priority during funding considerations. Hence larger scale RFA funding for West Victoria is questionable.

On the other hand, the retention of an amended, existing, RFA could make it easier for a future Victorian Government to reverse the protection currently offered to the Otway Forest Park, by reintroducing logging. Unlikely, but possible.

Conclusion

Any amendment to the existing RFA, as proposed, will not adequately meet the requirements of the region as the original RFA document was based on the retention of a large, viable timber industry that coexisted with a limited National Park/Reserve system. That relationship still exists in other parts of Victoria, and an amended RFA recognising Climate Change and other matters may be suitable for these parts of the State. West Victoria requires a different agreement, which recognises the predominance of National Parks/Reserves, and accepts that the timber industry no longer plays an important part in this part of the State of Victoria.

I therefore do not support the retention of an amended RFA for West Victoria unless it clearly recognises the existing status quo, provides research funding for Climate Change mitigation and seeks to correct the above listed management issues, and any other shortcomings.

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27-6-2019