

Victorian Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs)

Summary of the consultation process

A message from the Joint Victorian and Australian Government RFA Working Group

The Victorian and Australian Governments jointly undertook extensive consultation to understand community views on opportunities to improve the five Victorian RFAs. We are releasing independent reports on feedback we received from consultation with stakeholders and Victorian communities held between May and July 2019:

- the *'Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements – Independent Report on the Joint Victorian and Australian Government Consultation'* state-wide report on all feedback received via the online survey, written submissions, and face to face engagement held across Victoria, and
- individual reports on the face to face engagement held in Victoria's five RFA regions and Melbourne.

There were diverse views expressed during the consultation including the need for stronger protections for forests and threatened species, increased access for recreation and tourism, and greater stability and certainty of access to timber and other forest resources.

These consultation findings, along with input from Traditional Owners, updated assessments of forest values, new research and independent expert advice are informing negotiations between the Victorian and Australian Governments on modernisation of the RFAs.

RFAs are agreements between the Australian Government and states that establish the framework for the management of forests in an RFA region. They provide for a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system, ecologically sustainable management and use of forests, and the long-term stability of forests and forest industries within the Victorian RFA regions.

The Victorian and Australian Governments remain committed to working towards delivering a modernised and harmonised RFA framework that meets the needs of communities, industry and the environment.

On 7 November 2019, the Victorian Government announced that native forest harvesting will cease by 2030. The Australian and Victorian governments remain committed to delivering modernised RFAs and are considering the implications of Victoria's Forestry Plan to the RFAs.

Consultation

Consultation was designed to provide the opportunity for anyone interested in how Victoria's forests are managed to have their say.

There were a number of ways in which stakeholders and communities could contribute. These included:

- Lodging a written submission from 3 May until 7 July 2019
- Responding to an online survey open from 3 May until 7 July 2019
- Meeting face-to-face with Victorian and Australian Government representatives at a drop-in session, workshop event or one-on-one meeting from 3 June until 7 July 2019.

Through the consultation period, 135 written submissions, 733 surveys responses and comments from over 330 people at face-to-face consultations were received.

To provide context for feedback from the public, the Victorian and Australian Governments released the ['Independent Consultation Paper – Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements'](#) authored by Dr William Jackson in May 2019.

The paper provided an independent overview of the performance of the RFAs and posed a series of questions to help elicit community feedback on potential opportunities to improve the RFAs.

Online opportunities to be involved in the engagement process included a survey with targeted questions, and a written submission process to allow communities and stakeholders to express their feedback in a way that suited them.

Drop in events and online engagement were advertised via social media, print media (including newspapers), radio interviews, postcards, stakeholder newsletters and word of mouth through Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning staff and were open to any interested members of the public. In addition, workshops and one-on-one meetings were held with specific stakeholder groups such as environmental groups, the timber and forestry products industry, recreational users, local governments and catchment managers.

In total, 47 face-to-face events were held in regional and metropolitan Victoria. They were run by independent facilitators from the consultancy company Cloud Catcher and attended by staff from the Victorian and Australian Governments. These events were held in regional Victoria (Daylesford, Beaufort, Forrest, Geelong, Benalla, Corryong, Bairnsdale, Heyfield, Traralgon, Orbost, Alexandra, Marysville, Powelltown and Healesville) and Melbourne.

Independent reports on consultation

The Victorian and Australian Governments engaged Converlens (an independent qualitative data analysis company specialising in consultation processes) to collate and analyse all consultation feedback received via the online survey, written submissions and face-to-face engagement.

Converlens has produced ['Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements – Independent Report on the Joint Victorian and Australian Government Consultation'](#), an overarching report on all consultation across the state, that analyses and reports on the views and responses received from those who participated.

The report identifies the issues, themes and topics of importance raised in responses, as identified by the number and proportion of responses raising that issue.

Throughout the survey data used for this report, a number of pro forma responses were identified. The impacts of these responses were considered during the analysis to ensure that they did not unduly influence the results or obscure the range of themes present within each question.

Independent facilitators of the face-to-face engagement events, Cloud Catcher, produced [six reports \(one for each of the RFA regions and one for Melbourne\)](#) that summarise what was heard at the face-to-face sessions. These reports were inputs to the overarching consultation report prepared by Converlens.

The consultation reports reflect the views of those who chose to participate and may not be representative of the views of all Victorians.



The Victorian Government is working in partnership with Traditional Owners to support the protection of Country, maintain spiritual and cultural practices, and recognise the broader aspirations of Traditional Owners consistent with the journey towards self-determination. Traditional Owners met with the Victorian Government in October 2019 to discuss proposed new clauses for inclusion in the modernised Victorian RFAs.

The Victorian and Australian Governments would like to thank everyone who participated in the consultation process for their valuable feedback as we work towards the modernisation of the RFAs.

To find out more visit www.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests.

