

Written Response to Regional Forest Agreement, Victoria, 2019

At the outset, I would like it noted that the lack of publicity about these Victorian/Commonwealth Regional Forest Agreements (RFA's) and the process through which the public could have a say in how our public forests in Victoria are to be managed for the next twenty years was woefully inadequate.

I am a subscriber to the Melbourne AGE and did not see any ads advising citizens about how they might obtain further information about these RFA's. I only heard about them from some neighbours who had made the effort to travel into the City to an advisory meeting at the Royal Society on Friday 28th of June only to be told the meeting was cancelled.

Organising a public consultation late on a Friday afternoon in the CBD at the start of the School Holidays and then expecting comment by, today, Sunday, July 7th, slap bang in the middle of the School Holidays does not represent a genuine attempt to reach out to the public.

So not having had the opportunity to put my family's questions about the management of native forest on public land in Victoria to any Government representatives I will here simply list just a few of our family's concerns about these RFA's based on our limited understanding of them.

1) I understand that RFA's are twenty year long agreements between the State and Commonwealth Governments that allow logging of public native forests without requiring approval under national environmental laws like most other industries, for example mining.

Nearly two million hectares of forest in Victoria including in some catchment areas has been burnt in the last ten years by bush fires, made more destructive by these fires' intensity. Surely there's a case to be made to stop logging of native forest altogether, develop plantation timber on marginal farmland and move employment into a sustainable plantation based industry where all timber products are used.

2) We would all like to see more jobs in regional Australia but what about more people planting trees rather than cutting them down? Tree planting on appropriate unused land will not only help to meet our need for timber but to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in the urgent fight against global warming.

3) I understand that only 8% of areas identified for protection in the Victorian RFA's were formally protected in parks and reserves in contrast to 23% under similar agreements in N.S.W.

Far better, to include a greater proportion of the informal reserve system in the formal reserve system and protect it under the National Parks Act.

The Victorian National Parks Association points to a gap of some 2 million hectares in the formal reserve system in Victoria. Why can't this shortcoming be addressed?