



## **NTCA Submission on the Report on the Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements**

*The National Timber Councils Association is an incorporated local government association representing the interests of member municipal regional councils in relation to forestry on both public and private land. The Association's primary function is to provide a forum for local government to address the management of forests and forest industries and their impact on local communities.*



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The National Timber Councils Association (NTCA) would like to thank the Commonwealth Government and Victorian State Government for supporting a process that enables organisations such as ours to be heard. Our Association welcomes the submission process and is glad to make a submission.

The NTCA represents councils who host the forest industry from four states, New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, with informal connections to councils across the remainder of Australia.

The National Timber Councils Association aims to promote vibrant, resilient communities, maintain regional investment, employment opportunities and responsible environmental practices.

We acknowledge that the main objectives of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements are:

- To identify a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system and provide for the conservation of those areas
- To provide for the ecologically sustainable management and use of forests in each RFA regions, and
- To provide for the long-term stability of forests and forest industries

In regard to the modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements, we would like to make the following comments:

That prior to adding further areas into the CAR reserve system, that an independent review on the effectiveness of these reserve systems as well as the informal reserves is undertaken.

Security of supply is paramount not only to the forest industries but also for the economic viability of many of the rural communities within the Victorian RFA regions. The obligation under the agreement is *“to enhance security of access to resources on forested land for the life of the Agreement”<sup>1</sup>*, however when both parties do not seem to be in alignment regarding their vision of RFAs, there will undoubtedly be uncertainty. We note that the Commonwealth Government is committed to establishing 20 year rolling life with each RFA, however Victorian Government does not seem to hold the same view. We recommend that the Victorian Government join the Commonwealth Government in committing to establishing 20 year rolling life with each RFA.

The NTCA would like to see a process where the timber industry is notified at least one timber rotation period prior to any changes being made that impact on the timber supply.

While the obligations regarding the *“sustainable yield for RFA region will continue to be based on areas available for timber harvesting outside the CAR reserve system”* and that the *“Parties agree that any changes to the area of State forest available for timber harvesting will not lead to a net deterioration in the timber production capacity of those areas available for harvesting in terms of volume, species and quality”<sup>2</sup>* may provide in theory a level of certainty, it fails to recognise the threats to the industry and the need to provide some level of contingency. We believe that when issues arise in the proposed area in the Allocation Order, for example, due to bushfires or identification of a threaten species that requires buffer zones around it, then the lost area should be

provided elsewhere. Also, there probably needs to be a review on which allocation process, volume based vs area based provides the best outcome regarding security of supply.

The NTCA is in agreement with Dr William Jackson in that the Victorian RFAs have not provided for long term supply stability for the timber industry and the areas available for native timber harvesting have been substantially reduced in recent times.

In a report on the socio-economic characteristics of Victoria's forestry industries, 2009-2012 , when looking at the vulnerability of forest industry businesses to change, "businesses were asked what types of assistance can best assist them in adapting successfully to change: the most preferred assistance strategies were greater certainty of access to wood resources, and assistance to develop and access new markets."<sup>3</sup>

The Victorian Government needs to better manage its responsibility for forest regeneration, especially the pre VicForests areas. Not only does the government need to provide a detailed plan with a deadline for when re-treatment works are to be done, but also ensure the funding is made available to ensure plan can be completed. There should also be an annual report detailing progress. This needs to be top priority.

The industry is heavily regulated and closely scrutinised, the failure of the Victorian Government to complete their obligations can have a negative impact on the industry through public perception of the industry and its practices, as the public are not going to distinguish between industry and government responsibilities.

We have concerns that the timing of the five-yearly reviews are not occurring in a timely manner, so that milestones can be addressed appropriately in the following period and also provide some certainty on when reviews will take place. We recommend that timelines for the five yearly review should ultimately be set at the beginning of each 5 year period.

In regard to accountability, the Federal Government should be able to hold the Victorian Government accountable if they do not fulfil their obligations under this agreement.

In conclusion, the objective to provide long term stability of forest and forest industries is still not being met. In a carbon constraint world, the forest industry is well situated to prosper that will assist local, state and national economies however if long term security of supply cannot be guaranteed, industry and communities are placed at risk. As a result, both the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments need to provide proposals to support the economic viability of small towns.

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References:

1. State of Victoria- Report on Progress with Implementation of Victorian Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) Period 3: (2009-2014) November 2017. pg 30
2. State of Victoria – Report on Progress with implementation of Victorian Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) Period 3: (2009-2014) November 2017. pg 29
3. Dr Schirmer, Ms Muylek, Dr Morison – Socio-economic characteristics of Victoria’s forestry industries, 2009-2012: Executive summary, 2012. pg 8