

Gippsland Apiarists Association Inc (GAA). submission to the review of the Regional Forest Agreement, 28/6/2019, prepared by [REDACTED]

What changes have you seen in the RFA regions?

In the mixed species coastal forests our members have noted changes in the forest structure and species diversity, these changes have been occurring throughout our lifetimes and been more significant in many instances in the last twenty or so years.

Clearfelling has been extremely detrimental and fires both prescribed burns and wildfires that have been way too hot in the lower elevation mixed species forests, this has resulted in Silvertop and White Stringybark in particular being the predominate species in regenerating stands where previously a number of other species of eucalypt were well represented.

Banksia species have declined in areas as a result of clearfelling and excessively hot burns in some areas.

In tense fires, either prescribed burns or wildfire and clearfelling has created regeneration that is much denser than the forests have been in the past. An absence of regular properly conducted low intensity fires has resulted in forests with excessive understorey vegetation and excessive flammable litter priming the forests for devastating summer wildfires as well as making prescribed burns too intense. Appendix 1. Gives the GAA's perspective of fuel reduction/prescribed burning.

As a result of the management and changes we have seen the forests are dryer for longer periods and more fire prone.

2. The RFA's should be managed to recognise all forest users and conservation values. The RFA needs to be structured with a vision to manage our forests in perpetuity which hasn't happened in the period of the present RFA. The RFA seem to be an aid to a political response and not a sustainable environmental or economic response. The political response has been to simply try to balance the allocation of land area between timber resource allocation and timber harvesting exclusion with an indifference to the environmental management of either and an indifference to the best long term economic return to the state of the areas allocated for timber harvesting.

As a start to redressing the failures of the past the RFA should initiate procedures to change from clearfelling to selective harvesting with a bias towards species selection to work the species composition back towards its original state. There is a need to try to gain a greater understanding of changes in understorey species diversity and changes also.

3. Manage the forests so ecosystems are maintained as best as practicable and possible.

No clearfelling, selective logging and reintroduction of indigenous low intensity fire regimes as described in Appendix 1

Learn from past regeneration failures and commit to restoring past failures. There is a great opportunity for improvement so all uses and values are recognized but this needs to be in deed and not just word.

4. The consultation process is flawed in the extreme, there needs to be readily available information on such things volume of sawlog and pulp wood from all regions and even all harvested coupes within regions as well as the royalties paid per logging coupe. This needs to be available for scrutiny for those making a submission with time to analyse it.

Appendix 2 is my notes from the meeting of industry stake holders in Heyfield. Since that meeting I have had a quick look at the annual reports of Vicforest and not been able to find the information the GAA deem necessary to make a submission to this RFA process. At the East Gippsland Field Days I asked the Vicforest representative for information on the volume of sawlogs and pulpwood from logging coupes in East Gippsland and the Central Highlands region and he referred me to the Annual Reports on the Vicforests website. In the time I have had to do this submission I cannot find it and question if it is there. We don't have information on volumes of export woodchips from any of the forest regions available to us and this would be essential for a proper consultation process.

We haven't information available to us on future commitments of pulpwood that the RFA's are required to provide, if this review was serious these would be available to us.

The panel formulating the RFA need to spend more time in the forests with stake holders such as the GAA however we appreciate the time given to us so far.

5 We have covered the most important improvements above.

6. The beekeepers have traditionally worked the forests in Gippsland for honey production and in more recent years bees have had a greater role in pollination in the horticultural industry. We have been given values of honey bee pollination being worth from 10-20 billion annually in Australia but how do you put a value on it. No bees and there will be a massive drop in many horticultural crops and the particular crops will simply be unavailable, you can't put a dollar value on that. Almonds provide an example of the economic value of bees; we are reaching a 1 billion farm gate price and no bees means no almonds. Access to healthy forests is necessary for commercial beekeepers to maintain colony health throughout the year and the honey production from our forests is necessary in addition to income from pollination to make a commercial operation viable.

7. The Gippsland Apiarists Association supports multiuse's such as harvesting fence posts, poles, firewood and other products. We believe the changes away from small locally owned sawmills to larger mills sourcing their logs from further afield has resulted in forest operators with a lesser understanding of environmentally sustainable and locally sustainable economic issues. This relates to the demise of the many small family owned mills throughout Gippsland, many with an intergenerational connection to the forests.

The greatest threats to recreation, which basically equates to the tourist dollar for the local economy are negative effects of clearfelling, environmentally devastating megafires and to a lesser extent inappropriate and inadequate management of prescribed burns. I will provide personal examples of this, forty odd years ago we could walk into the wilderness and much of it was more open and clear, we could walk into isolated rivers and creeks with usually abundant fishing. Now it is often far more scrubby and much harder to hike through the same areas with a pack, the health of the catchments has significantly deteriorated and as a result the rivers and creeks have far less fish. The connection with nature was far greater. We haven't seen the increase in the tourism dollar that would have occurred if the forests were in a more natural state.

8. What are our views on the existing environmental protection afforded across the entire forest estate?

A Hindu saying-

You can't conserve what you don't love

You can't love what you don't understand.

You can't understand what you don't know.

It is hard to know where to start with this question; we will start with management to prevent fire. We have seen environmental devastation on a massive scale in the alpine environment along the Great Dividing Range covering most of the area from west of the Licola-Jamison Road to the NSW border. To understand the reason first start with

appendix 3 which are notes presented to the Royal Society of Victoria by Alfred Howitt in 1890, he details changes in the Gippsland environment as a result of the disposition of the Aborigines and an end of their management of the land with regular low intensity burns.

The changes primed the forests for high intensity fires that have been extremely damaging.

Appendix four is an article that I had published in Voice of the Mountains in 1988 documenting the beneficial effects of the traditional burning of the mountain cattlemen who largely protected the areas they worked from fires such as 1926 and 1939.

The legislative response to protecting much of the alpine area it was a political response by declaring it a National Park and putting it in the hands of managers that seemingly have no understanding knowledge of the ecological history of the area. The absence of will to learn from the mistakes that have caused a world class ecological catastrophe can only be an absence of love for the environment given by legislation to the government managers.

There has been no protection for this environment; there has been no protection for the timber resource in this environment. We are primed for greater devastation to the

environment, timber resource and to the floral resource necessary to beekeepers, it won't and can't be changed quickly but it is imperative that changes be initiated.

Government is supporting large scale environmental devastation with clearfelling and inappropriate prescribed burning.

9. Management practices that promote environmental values and conserve biodiversity values.

Traditional owner rights and partnerships is an interesting issue. We haven't been made aware of a great deal of traditional knowledge amongst the traditional owners in Gippsland since the passing of one of Gippsland's most respected Elders, Phillip Pepper in the mid 1980's. I attended the launch of his book *The Kurnai of Gippsland*, co written with Tess De Araugo on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1985. At that book launch he spoke briefly of the traditional management of the land with regular fire and how the remaining forests had deteriorated as a result of a much reduced fire frequency.

I attended two workshops by Queensland Indigenous Burning Practitioner Victor Steffenson in Gippsland and was in awe of his knowledge, many local Traditional owners were in attendance, including many of the younger generation and he was extremely well accepted by them. With the right influences we believe there is potentially a great benefit from Indigenous knowledge.

11. In the time available to us we can't get formulate a position on question 11 regards the Traditional owners rights to economic and cultural opportunities.

12. There are conflicting views on climate change, a view that it is largely cyclic and views that it is largely caused by humans. The survey paper would need to be clear which view that we should be responding to or if we should analyse the evidence for either view and respond to the particular view (cyclic or human induced) that best survived analysis.

An analysis of history and the science relating past cyclic factors shows that we need to manage the forests differently if they are to be sustainable. This is based on a probable link between solar activity and rainfall and very good science indicating we are entering an extended period of low solar activity. If this analysis is correct then the more fire prone forests resulting from clearfelling and inappropriate fire regimes will lead to greater environmental disasters in the future.

An analysis of some of the material supporting a hypothesis of human induced global warming clearly leads to conclusions that require the same responses as the climate changing by cyclic causes.

13. With an estimated average annual value of 6 billion dollars to the Victorian economy through pollination services the Apiary industry is currently undervalued in the contribution

it makes to the state's economy.

Ensuring stable access to both state and conserved forests and ensuring the health of the forests in balance with other forest users is critical to the ongoing contribution of apiary industry to the states economy. Beekeepers increasingly have to travel greater distances to find floral resources, reasons for this include a changing climate, deteriorating forest health, loss of areas traditionally worked because of the very large and devastating wildfires of the last couple of decades and loss to areas clearfelled.

16. We believe there is a very real need for research on changes in forest structure, biodiversity loss, ecosystem health and the strategies needed to give the best results. Such research should involve the knowledge gained through observation of bush users such as beekeepers and the Traditional Owners. The accumulated intergenerational knowledge of many beekeepers needs to be part of the formulation of research projects.

17. How could the RFA monitoring, review (including the five yearly reviews) and reporting arrangements be improved?

There needs to open and transparent information available on returns from royalties to the state for every logging coupe, volumes of sawlogs from every logging coupe and volumes of export and domestic pulp wood provided via an easily accessed website when the reviews occur. There also should be dollar values on payments from bee sites to the state for all areas under consideration for logging, particularly areas to be clearfelled. This would allow a comparison between the value of royalties to the state from bee sites over an 80 year period and royalties from clearfelling on an 80 year rotation. Such information is necessary for a proper assessment during this stage of the RFA process and we have not been made aware of the information.