

## Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements

Written submission June 30, 2019

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

### General Submission

During the last 20 years since my participation in the first workshops leading up to the Regional Forests Agreement for Southwest Victoria where sustaining the regional biodiversity was nominated as the first and supreme priority of the regional forest agreement, I have learned of and seen first-hand the damage that forestry has caused in SW Victoria's forests. Specifically, hollow-bearing (habitat) trees have been impacted upon by unsupervised forestry practices. Further damage has occurred through unsupervised firewood collection in the State's forests where trees have been illegally chopped down and travel and transport in the forests has damaged the habitat. There is nothing in the previous 20 years of forestry undertaken by VicForests that gives me confidence in forestry practitioners to supervise their own wood extraction to a standard that upholds the first priority of maintaining biodiversity in the Crown Lands where forestry is permitted to occur.

I have attended two workshops in this 2019 round of the Modernisation discussion to provide for an improved renewed Victorian Forest Agreement. However, given that the forest agreements currently have no mechanism for ensuring compliance of forestry practitioners and fire-wood collectors to ensure that the principle of conservation and biodiversity are not only the highest priority, but that they are also the principle that governs the actions of wood extractors. I have very little confidence in the Regional Forest Agreement to ensure the conservation of our forests.

Given the State's inadequacy in monitoring and auditing the actions of all people involved in forestry of our State's forests and bringing people acting outside the agreement to account. I would suggest that either

1. The regional forest agreements be discontinued and a new system of governance be instituted to ensure that forestry and wood-collection practices be closely and carefully monitored to ensure that the habitats and conservation of biodiversity are not further compromised. I suggest that a statutory body independent of VicForests be responsible for overseeing the actions undertaken by foresters and wood-collectors. I would also recommend that a levy commensurate with the proposed wood extraction be imposed on all people and companies engaged in forestry and wood-collection to provide funds for any restitution of forests that is needed following any extraction or other events that may damage our forests (for example, fires and floods).
2. That if the regional forest agreements are to be continued, then the State Government must include in these agreements provision for the responsibility for overseeing the actions of foresters and wood collectors and that this be done by a body independent of the foresters and wood-collectors.

Furthermore, I would like the State Government not to make the forestry industry the first priority (as it has done by default over the last 20 years), but to really act to maintain

conservation and biodiversity in our forests as the main concern. The State Government can do this by ensuring that when forests have been damaged through natural processes such as fire and flood, these affected forests are quarantined from forestry and wood-collecting until they have recovered from these natural disasters.

To ensure that forestry has a future, forestry must be taken out of the natural forests and turned over to plantation forestry. In order for this to happen the State Government must derive funds from forestry bodies (whether through specific levies, taxes etc) and start the process of developing forests on already altered landscapes to allow our native forests and their native plants and animals to recover from the damage inflicted by forestry and wood-collection in the last 20 years.

In summary, the Regional Forests Agreements have not been successful in protecting the native forests and their biodiversity, nor have they been successful as an instrument to ensure compliance of foresters and wood-collectors. The lax supervision by the State Government of foresters and wood-collectors must be addressed by applying stricter supervision and controls of foresters and wood-collectors and by applying penalties on those who act outside State sanctioned wood-extraction activities.

