

Modernisation of the RFAs

In the earlier years of the Current expiring RFAs when I was more directly involved with the process I waited anxiously for the first 5 year report, considering it to be an important measure of the process viability. This Report never appeared. I wrote the RFA process off as deeply flawed as it did not even attempt to meet its obligations for feedback.

Economic Issues

The longer term performance of the RFA is exemplified by the performance of the industry.

VicForests continues to require **Taxpayer Subsidies** to operate. This indicates that it is under-recovering its costs.

Intensive Logging has significant effects upon **Yield of Water** into Catchments. In the case of Mountain Ash forests this is particularly dramatic with yields to streams dropping by around one half over the period of most vigorous re-generative growth about 10 to 30 years after logging.

It is arguable that water is our most critical commodity and that the combined effects of the Climate Emergency and rapidly increasing population are carrying us rapidly to a very difficult situation. The cost of logging therefore must include realistic costs of Water Yield foregone if we are to maintain rational control of the balance of our resources.

Pulpwood is by far the greatest proportion of the timber taken from the Mountain Ash forests of the Central Highlands. It can be supplied from shorter rotations. It earns very poor revenue. The short rotations have greatly diminished our ability to supply more valuable sawlog.

State Forest Resource Inventory (SFRI) & Coupe Auditing

Several innovations brought in by the Bracks government, when newly elected were commendable.

One was the move to slightly improve separation of responsibility for logging (VicForests) by removing coupe auditing into the EPA and inviting public involvement.

The SFRI was an excellent idea, which not surprisingly attracted considerable criticism in areas where it was found to be lacking accuracy. However the idea was excellent.

Remote sensing has developed enormously in the interim and new Satellite, Aerial and Artificial Intelligence technology have developed and become affordable. The potential for much better resource planning would seem to be great.

Water Quality

Logging has significant effects upon turbidity and sediment in watercourses, even with good practice in riparian and buffer zones. Topsoil is loosened and heavy rains move it into streams. I have seen fence posts downstream, silted halfway up their height.

Some serendipitous investigation of Conductivity in a small stream following logging in the Strzeleckis resulted in a discovery of elevated salinity levels, up to five-fold, over some years following the logging. Probably a result of changes in water tables.

I expect to see this effect in the Rubicon, Snobs Creek catchments, feeding the Goulburn/Murray. This area is currently being almost moonscaped on a scale that I have not previously seen.

Forest Industry Issue, Sawlog availability

Particularly in the Mountain Ash country it seems that rotations are becoming shorter. The yield of Pulpwood is good but this is leading to the very well publicised inability to supply sawlog which requires more patience and longer rotations. Sawlog has been a better value and employment prospect than pulpwood and chipping in outlying regional areas.

Biodiversity Tourism & Recreational Issues

As a world leader in extinctions, and with the certainty of the Climate Emergency causing rapidly increasing bushfire frequency and intensity we are rapidly fouling our own nest.

When we cannot grow out our forests to sawlog rotations we are never going to provide mature and senescent habitat trees.

Failed regenerations and large expanses of blackberry, thistle and ragwort are far too common and poorly managed in our logged areas.

Diverse forest structures are much more resistant to weeds, insects and disease than are the monocultures that are promoted by VicForest practices.

Plantation and young forest is much more flammable than is old growth.

Political Issue

The Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996 Which applies to much of the Central Highlands Mountain Ash country is quite clearly inappropriate for the future.

It provides no effective mechanisms for adjustment as a result of unsustainable practices or to correct for the increasing issue of Force Majeure caused by increasing frequency and intensity of major bushfires.

That subsidies should be payable for transport of timber from outside the concession area is questionable.

The Act cannot be allowed to stand in its current form.

The industry it feeds is no longer Australian owned. It is mature and should be able to pay viable prices for pulpwood and plantation feed. The irrationality of the same company shipping timber/chips to Japan out of western Victoria, rather than adding the value and employment here is startling.

Health Issue

So called regeneration burns, often coinciding with fire hazard reduction burns are creating smoke pollution at levels previously unseen except during major bushfires. These are affecting asthmatics even into the outskirts of Melbourne.



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