

Future of our Forests

Modernising the management of Victoria's forests

September 2019 Newsletter



Update from the Program Director

It is my pleasure to share with you the latest news on the significant work underway to modernise the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) - important agreements for sustainable management of forests made between the State and Commonwealth Governments – and broader forest management modernisation.

As you may know, the forest management system is complex and multi-faceted. It provides for conservation of flora and fauna biodiversity; cultural, recreation and leisure values; fire management; protection of soil, water and air quality; carbon sequestration; and industry use and economic returns.

The first significant part of the program of forest management reform is modernising the RFAs which are due for renewal by March 2020. We are proud to note that Victoria is the only state in Australia who has chosen to modernise its RFAs and initiate review and reform of its forest management system. This is a huge but exciting undertaking.



Alongside modernising the RFAs, is the broader program of forest management reform that includes development of a vision for the management of Victoria's public native forests. The Department of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning's (DELWP) State Forest Management Strategy and Parks Victoria's Land Management Strategy will build on the vision and guide development of integrated forest and fire management plans at a regional level.

Intensive engagement with stakeholders and the community, independent expert advice, and the latest science and research is informing modern RFAs and, modernisation of forest management in Victoria.



The '*Future of our Forests Feedback Report*', reporting on findings from community engagement held by DELWP from December 2018 – March 2019, shows that Victorians value forests for their beauty and biodiversity, and for providing clean water and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Throughout the engagement process Victorians have made it clear they enjoy accessing and using forests for many reasons including for recreation, health and wellbeing and want to continue to access forests. Read the full report: www.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests/our-community/forests-and-forest-management

Community values and the latest science are reinforcing that forests need to be actively managed and cared for, for the many benefits they provide to Victorians.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in this important work.

Courtney Bertram

Program Director, Regional Forest Agreements

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Traditional Owner Partnership and self-determination

DELWP recognises the importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in land management. We value the unique ability of Victorian Traditional Owners to care for Country and their deep spiritual connection to it and are particularly aware of the opportunity we have now as we work to develop future forest management, to explore and provide for how we can work together.



Discussions with Traditional Owners through Registered Aboriginal Parties and the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations continue to inform how we can better partner in forest management in ways that respect and safeguard traditional knowledge and enable self-determination.

Partnership and Engagement Coordinator positions within Registered Aboriginal Party groups continue to be recruited to as another means to support partnership between Traditional Owners and DELWP in future forest management.

In the first week of September, an induction workshop was held to welcome the Coordinators, establish connections and start planning.

DELWP together with the Coordinators is supporting and guiding Traditional Owners to undertake their own Cultural Values assessment projects funded through the program. The next stage is an inception event in Gippsland to commence the work of planning the cultural forest strategy (yet to be named), akin to the Cultural Fire Strategy.

Understanding how people value forests is key to future forest management

Community engagement is informing modernisation of the RFAs and forest management more broadly.



(In the forest) "I have a sense of place"; "... (it's) a place to enjoy and for everyone to utilise" are just some of the things young people told us they value about forests at the Youth Forest Symposium held in March.

Victorians value forests for many uses

Through engagement activity so far, Victorians have told us they value forests for their beauty and biodiversity, and clean water and reducing the impacts of climate change. Victorians enjoy accessing and using forests for many reasons including for recreation, health and wellbeing and want forests preserved for access and use by future generations. Desire for partnership with Traditional Owners' in future forest management is a consistent message we are hearing.

We heard this in person at meetings across Victoria; at the first Youth Forest Symposium; and, from people who did online surveys between December 2018 – March 2019. Read the full report and verbatim accounts of what Victorians' value about our forests at www.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests/our-community/forests-and-forest-management. Click through to see a short video of the Youth Forest Symposium.

Community discussions on potential improvements to the Regional Forest Agreements

In June, joint engagement activities by the Victorian and Australian Governments were held across Victoria, specifically to hear how RFAs could be improved.

Discussion were framed around the Independent Consultation paper (available on the Future of our Forests website) produced by Dr William Jackson and enabled valuable information exchange.

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Engagement events such as this Gippsland drop-in session, had representatives from the timber industry, apiarists, environment groups, local government, recreational users, tour operators, and residents who appreciated the opportunity to meet with State and Commonwealth Government staff to talk about the Regional Forest Agreements.

Government representatives heard from locals as to how effective they feel RFAs have been and discussed opportunities for improvements. This information is helping to shape modernised RFAs.

Formal reports on the period of joint government RFA community engagement activity will be available soon via the Engage Victoria and Future of our Forests websites.



Comprehensive review of the Code of Practice for Timber Production

The *Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014* (the Code) outlines the environmental standards for planning and conducting commercial timber harvesting operations.

A comprehensive review of the Code will commence in the last quarter of this year with the aim to make the Code stronger, clearer and more enforceable. A period of community consultation will be part of and inform the review.

Scientific assessments are informing future forest management

Modernisation of forest management considers a broad variety of forest values and relies on the latest robust science to inform decision making and planning.

Ecosystem Climate Change Vulnerability Project

DELWP is working with Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research, Melbourne University, and species experts to improve knowledge of the impacts of climate change on forest ecosystems.

Modelling and expert knowledge is being used to evaluate the conservation status of ecological vegetation communities - different types of plants living in our forests - and investigate the vulnerability of ecosystems and species threatened by climate change.

This is the start of this work which will continue to improve and build knowledge to inform current reform and ongoing forest management in Victoria.



Comprehensive assessments of forest extent and health are informing modern forest management.

Exploring Conservation of Soil and Water

The free public lecture series, delivered in partnership with the Royal Society of Victoria, continues to be received well with enthusiastic attendance.

At the July lecture, the fourth lecture in the series, speakers addressed Criterion 4: Conservation and Maintenance of Soil and Water Resources of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability's *State of the Forests Report*.

The topics covered provided a range of perspectives related to the effect of forest growth dynamics and disturbances, with practical examples from the field and associated policy.

We thank Dr René Van der Sant, Professor Patrick Lane, Jason Alexandra, Dr Tim Peterson, and Rachel Brown for sharing their expertise.

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Dr Rene Van der Sant presenting at the public lecture.

More information and videos from the event are available on the Future of our Forests website.

Latest technology is capturing historic heritage

Historic heritage - the physical evidence of past human activity such as mining, transport, etc or intangible qualities such as people's past associations with or feelings for a place – is one of many forest attributes people value.

Accurate identification and mapping of historical heritage locations enables DELWP to keep them safe, maintained and protected for future generations to learn from and enjoy.

One recent example of historic heritage that's been added to DELWP's maps, thanks to input from the Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc., are the network of timber tramways that cross the Central Highlands and were in use in the late 1800s.



DELWP staff member in the forest at a historic heritage site.



DELWP staff member in the forest mapping a historic heritage site using the Geo-Collector App.

A Geo-Collector App is in development to enable staff, whilst in the forest, to correct current information and add new historic heritage information, automatically updating the source maps for forest management planning.

Independent expert advice is guiding future forest management

The RFA Reference Group and the Scientific Advisory Panel were both established to provide valuable independent expert guidance to DELWP as it works to modernise the RFAs and forest management.

Final reports of advice from each group have been received and are informing changes to the RFAs. The reports will be made available on the Future of our Forests website in coming weeks.

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Diverse community interests discussed and considered

Advice from the RFA Reference Group, made up of people representing a range of community interests including Traditional Owner, environment, industry and recreation groups, is informed by community needs and aspirations.

The Reference Group has been meeting regularly to discuss issues and opportunities regarding modernisation of the RFAs and has provided a forum for robust discussion informed by contemporary community values.

More information about the Reference Group and meeting summaries are available on the Future of our Forests website.

Expert scientific guidance from the independent Scientific Advisory Panel

The scientific expertise and input from the dedicated and independent Scientific Advisory Panel has been assisting modernisation of the RFAs and forest management and will help to ensure our forests are resilient and our management practices are adaptive to a changing climate.

To assist the Panel to formulate their advice they have had expert briefings on a range of forest issues and are contributing their own specialist knowledge to discussions and debate around the complexities of forest management.

More information about the Panel and meeting notes is available via the Future of our Forests website.

Keeping up with news on the Future of our Forests

There is lots happening to inform all aspects of future forest management. For more information on this important work please see updates on the Future of our Forests website www.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests and look out for the next issue of this newsletter.

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Key engagement contacts

If you would like further information on the RFA Modernisation Program, or to find out about engagement activities happening in your area, please contact your local RFA Engagement Coordinator:

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