

Enhancing Biodiversity Conservation

The Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement announced by Tasmanian and Australian governments will deliver important gains for the conservation of biodiversity in Tasmanian forests.

The new reserves will protect 120,490 hectares of old-growth forest on public land across Tasmania, from the rainforests in the north-west to the tall wet eucalypt forests of the south, to the drier forests in the east and south-east. One of the significant features of the new reserves is greater protection of old-growth forest types for which the national forest reservation targets had not been fully achieved through the Tasmanian Regional Forest Agreement (RFA). The reservation of several old-growth forest communities will now fully meet these targets, while substantial improvements have been achieved in many others, with reservation levels increased by more than 10 per cent. The phase-out of broadscale clearing and conversion of native forest, the improved environmental safeguards in the assessment of forest clearing and greater protection for non-forest native vegetation will provide better long-term security for biodiversity across the landscape. According to the 2003 Tasmanian State of the Environment Report, land clearing is the most significant threat to biodiversity in Tasmania and is also a significant threat to water quality, and one of the main causes of soil erosion and salinity. Conservation goals for forests cannot be met without the support of private landowners. Nearly 30 per cent of Tasmania's forest is on private land. The Australian Government will help private landowners manage their land for conservation through a new program – the Forest Conservation Fund. The program will be managed jointly with Tasmania and will be seeking 43,200 hectares of private forest for voluntary covenanting or purchase at market value, and will include an additional component that will be seeking voluntary protection of 2,400

hectares of private land in the Mole Creek region. The program will focus on adding old-growth forest to the reserve system, as well as other under-reserved forest types.

The new reserves on public land will protect many important habitats for Tasmania's unique species. Wielangta Hill is a new reserve located in the south-east of Tasmania and is considered a wildlife refuge for various species and communities of conservation significance, including the eastern barred bandicoot, native trout, stag beetles and the swift parrot. The area has special qualities with relict rainforest merging with wet and dry sclerophyll forests.

The forests package will also make a major contribution to helping save the Tasmanian devil by contributing \$2 million over two years to accelerate current research by the Tasmanian Government into the devil facial tumour disease, which has emerged as a serious threat to the Tasmanian devil.

The Tarkine rainforests have been identified by ecologists and conservationists as significant on a global scale. The substantial new reserves in the north-west mean that nearly all the rainforest in the Tarkine area is protected. The area is home to over 50 rare, threatened and endangered species, including 16 species found nowhere else. These new reserves will also enhance the protection of the giant freshwater crayfish.