

Implications of the Package for Private Landholders

The Australian and Tasmanian governments remain committed to the conservation and sustainable management of private forests. Promoting sustainable management of private forests is central to ensuring that private forests continue to make an important contribution to Tasmania's forest-based industries and the protection of Tasmania's natural and cultural heritage.

The 1997 Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) recognised the importance of reserving high conservation forests on private land as part of a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system. It can, however, be financially difficult for landholders to manage the forest on their land as part of the reserve system.

As part of the new RFA Supplementary Agreement for Tasmania, the Tasmanian and Australian governments have agreed on an integrated approach to securing environmental outcomes on private land and assisting private landholders to play their part.

The Australian government will establish a new program, managed jointly with Tasmania, to conserve forest values on private land through voluntary reservation. The new program will be designed to give landowners more options for the management of their land.

The Forest Conservation Fund (FCF) will seek bids from the owners of high conservation value forest through a 'tender' or 'auction' process. This means that landowners will be able to nominate the value that they place on managing their land for conservation. Alternatively, the FCF will be able to fund purchase of land either by the State or by conservation trusts. The Australian Government will contribute \$5.5 million towards the long-term management of the land protected under the FCF.

The existing Private Forest Reserves Program, which also supports private landowners to manage the conservation values of their forest, will finish in June 2006. Landholders who are currently engaged in negotiations under the existing program will be able to continue these negotiations, or may elect to participate in the FCF.

Changes to the Tasmanian Permanent Forest Estate Policy and new legislation for the management of threatened non-forest vegetation will strengthen the protection of native vegetation. Sustainable private native forest management, as regulated through the Forest Practices Code, will be unaffected.

Governments have agreed to phase out clearing and conversion of forest, to ensure the protection of regional biodiversity and water quality values and to meet salinity objectives. The revised Permanent Forest Estate Policy will resolve the controversy and uncertainty that has surrounded decisions about land use change and protection of regional values in Tasmania for some time now.

The phase-out will take place over a period of 10 years. There will be a cap on the total area that may be cleared over that time. The cap will ensure that 95 per cent of the 1996 area of native forest on both public and private land is retained. During the phase-out, clearing will be assessed to ensure that regional biodiversity objectives are not compromised and water and land values are maintained. The new Forest Conservation Fund will give landholders a financial alternative to forest clearing or conversion.

The RFA Supplementary Agreement also includes a commitment by the Tasmanian Government to regulate by December 2005 to prevent the clearing and conversion of rare, endangered and vulnerable non-forest vegetation on public and private land. Land uses that maintain conservation values will not be precluded and assistance will be available to landholders for the conservation management of threatened vegetation through Tasmanian programs.

The Australian Government is providing \$4 million to fast-track research into and uptake of alternatives to 1080 use on private land. The objective is to develop and encourage adoption of alternatives to 1080 that land managers can use to protect seedlings in plantations, regrowth forests and pastures from grazing animals.