



What is the RFA?

The Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) for the NSW region of Eden will be the first of a series of agreements between the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments on the future use and management of the native forests in New South Wales.

The RFA will be for up to 20 years, subject to five-yearly reviews, and will aim to provide certainty for industry, conservation and community. It has three main objectives:

- to protect environmental values in a world class system of national parks and other reserves;
- to encourage job creation and growth in forest-based industries, including wood products, tourism and minerals; and
- to manage all native forests in an ecologically sustainable way.

Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) Reserve System

The RFA aims to establish a reserve system which is based on the nationally agreed JANIS criteria for the forests' biodiversity, old growth, wilderness and other natural and cultural values. (The JANIS criteria are the 'Nationally Agreed Criteria for the Establishment of a Comprehensive Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Forests in Australia'. "JANIS" stands for the Joint ANZECC/MCFFA National Forest Policy Statement Implementation Subcommittee, which developed the criteria.) The CAR reserve system will include dedicated reserves (national parks, nature reserves and flora reserves), informal reserves within State forests, the protection of values by prescription in areas available for timber harvesting and voluntary provisions for protecting conservation values on private land.

Industry Development Opportunities

The RFA will include a number of initiatives to help create an internationally competitive timber industry, including removal of Commonwealth export woodchip controls. Other initiatives may include new investment opportunities such as a hardwood 'recovery' mill at Eden allowing maximum use of timber resource, assistance to promote marketing and skills development and investment in value-adding technologies, plantation and farm forestry development and initiatives to facilitate infrastructure development and tourism.

Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM)

The RFA will include a number of initiatives to improve ESFM for the region, including: arrangements for monitoring and review, appropriate forest practices such as silviculture, development of performance indicators, research requirements and fire protection and management arrangements for regrowth forest.

Monitoring, reporting and review will be an integral part of the agreement, which must accredit codes of forest practice, identify performance indicators and identify a mechanism for updating the agreement.

Issues identified by the Regional Forest Forum will also be considered, including the importance to the region of softwood industry development and the need for more strategic decision making.

The RFA process

The RFA process began in New South Wales nearly two years ago. It has three phases.

- The first was the **Comprehensive Regional Assessment phase**, to provide the information base for the RFA. It involved scientific assessments of all the environmental, heritage, social and economic uses and values of the forests, with the close involvement of major stakeholders in the design and implementation of assessment projects.
- The second phase in the Eden region was the **options development phase** in which all of the assessment data was merged and scenarios developed to define different options for the RFA.
- Over the next six weeks, public comment is invited on the issues raised in the report, *Towards an Eden Regional Forest Agreement* before joint consideration of submissions by the Commonwealth and State governments and the actual finalisation of the agreement between the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments.

Managing the process

A Steering Committee has had the job of coordinating and facilitating the whole process, approving projects and integrating the various assessments that make up the Comprehensive Regional Assessment phase.

It has been assisted by technical committees that have been reviewing past research, recommending and monitoring new research projects and collating data for each assessment to ensure maintenance of high standards.

Representatives of major stakeholder groups have been active members of the technical committees and have made a major contribution to project selection, specification and management of projects.

The process has also been informed by members of the Eden Regional Forest Forum, who have provided an important mechanism for community input to the process and a focus for disseminating information back to the community.