**modernisation and extension of victorian regional forest agreements**

On 30 March 2020, 10 year extensions were formalised for the five Victorian Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) covering the Central Highlands, East Gippsland, Gippsland, North East and West Victorian regions. The extensions followed an assessment process, public consultation and independent review.

This table summarises key changes that have been made to the Victorian RFAs as part of the modernisation and extension process.

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| Streamlined and strengthened review and reporting arrangements | The RFAs include requirements for outcomes focussed reporting which will be:   * in line with international indicators * consistent with the Australian Government’s State of the Forests Report series   Reviews will no longer be an administrative clause by clause audit. |
| Improved communication and consultation between the Commonwealth and the Victorian Government | The RFAs include requirements for annual officials-level bilateral meetings, between five-yearly reviews, to monitor implementation and discuss issues relating to the RFAs. A communique of each meeting will be published publicly. |
| Introduction of a ‘Major Event Review’ | Should an event, such as bushfires, floods, diseases or other significant changes in circumstance occur, the governments can now assess the impact of that event on the operation of the RFAs through a Major Event Review.  This allows for the governments to consider the impacts of events on the effectiveness and operation of the RFAs. The Major Event Review process will be conducted by an independent panel and include opportunity for public consultation. |
| Requirements for Victoria to consult the Commonwealth before varying productive or conservation forest areas. | The Victorian Government will notify the Commonwealth of any substantive changes to the Forest Management System and, where possible, discuss the proposed changes with the Commonwealth in advance of any final decision.  The Victorian Government will also notify and discuss with the Commonwealth any substantive changes to the Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system that will significantly impact on MNES or the wood supply to industry. |
| New clauses about Traditional Owners | The RFAs now recognise the role of Traditional Owners in caring for Country. Victoria is partnering with Traditional Owners in the management of land, including forests.  The RFAs recognise the importance of Traditional Owner Knowledge in land management and commit Victoria to work with Traditional Owners to increase their involvement in decision making. |
| New section on Climate Change | The RFAs now include a section recognising the impacts of Climate Change. The governments have acknowledged that Climate Change is driving more extreme weather and disturbance events that will impact on a wide range of forest values, and climate change adaptation will need to be integrated into forest management and the CAR reserve to build resilience and manage climate risks.  The impacts of Climate Change on Victoria’s forests will now be considered during each five-yearly review. |
| Added section on Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES).  This includes World Heritage, National Heritage values, threatened species and communities and listed migratory species. | The RFAs include a significantly expanded section dealing with Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) including Listed Species and Communities.  These sections include requirements for Victoria to maintain a Forest Management System that provides for the protection and management of MNES and the conservation and recovery of Listed Species and Communities.  The five-yearly reviews will demonstrate how the parties have provided for the protection of MNES including condition trends of relevant matters. |
| Increased focus on ‘Forest Industries’ and other forest values and uses. | The modernised RFAs include consideration of a range of forest industries, values and uses which include timber and forestry products industries (including plantations), apiculture, tourism and recreation, water and carbon markets. |
| Termination clauses without Commonwealth consent | New termination provisions have been added in the Central Highlands, North East, Gippsland and West Victoria RFAs that allow for Victoria to terminate the RFAs upon a change of Victorian government policy, provided that the State gives the Commonwealth notice in writing at least 12 months prior to the date on which the termination will take effect. |
| Sustainable Yield replaced by ‘Harvest Level’ | In the context of the Victorian Government’s decision to cease native forest harvesting by 2030, the extended RFAs will no longer contain the concept of Sustainable Yield of wood from native forests, which is the amount of wood that could be harvested from a region in perpetuity. All the RFAs, except East Gippsland, formerly identified a specific yield of sawlogs from native forests that was expected to be available, subject to review.  The extended Victorian RFAs instead contain a new term “Harvest Level” referring to the amount of wood that can be harvested in any one year consistent with the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management. Victoria has committed to forecast and publish the Harvest Level under the extended RFAs |