

## **Background.**

The Regional Forest Agreements were preceded by Comprehensive Regional Assessments (CRA's) which involved detailed ecological investigations. This data provided the foundation for the RFAs. RFAs accredit logging under the Commonwealth *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC Act) so day to day Commonwealth oversight is removed from logging operations.

Broadly, the RFAs were designed to facilitate multiple uses of public native forests: conservation (via the establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative, reserve network of forest ecosystems); timber extraction and recreation. The concept of Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management, which incorporates the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development, was to underpin logging to ensure that logging did not result in negative impacts on forest ecosystems.

The aims of the Regional Forest Agreements pertained to various issues such as ecologically sustainable forest management; threatened species; World Heritage and Wilderness; community uses of forests and providing for a thriving timber industry. The National Parks Association of NSW conducted a [detailed review of RFAs](#) in NSW in 2016 and concluded that they have failed to achieve their aims.

## **Comments on the review**

**The Regional Forest Agreements must not be renewed.** The RFAs have failed to protect the environment, [failed to result in a thriving timber industry](#) and are driving climate change. The RFAs are therefore a failed model for forest management.

**This public asset must be managed for the public good.** Logging is robbing future generations. The progress report for the RFA review fails to provide any data to support the assertions that logging is conforming to ESFM. In contrast, there is lots of [evidence](#) that forest wildlife is in decline, we know [logging reduces carbon stores](#) and [water supplies](#) and we know the majority of people support protecting forests.

**We can implement alternative models for forest management.** We can do better than industrially logging diverse, living ecosystems. National Parks Association of NSW's (NPA) [Forests For All](#) plan seeks to protect forests to facilitate increased human access for health and wellbeing, recreation and education. The [Great Koala National Park](#) proposal would help protect koalas and become a huge tourist attraction (*local groups should also reference their own national park proposals*).

**Other values of forests must be considered.** [Research](#) in the Victorian Central Highlands shows that the value of water, carbon and tourism dwarf that of timber. Our Governments must consider all economic and social benefits from forests.

**The Government should use the end of the RFAs as the point at which it implements a just transition out of native forest logging on public land.**

### **The Regional Forest Agreements are bad for forests**

Almost 20 years after the RFAs were signed, there is extensive evidence that the RFAs have failed to facilitate Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management; failed to result in an economically sound timber industry; and the CAR reserve network of forest ecosystems has not been delivered. RFAs are therefore a failed model for forest management and should not be renewed.

Accreditation of logging operations has resulted in lower protection for forest species, and has not been complied with, as demonstrated by the [multitude of license breaches](#). Commonwealth oversight of forest management must be restored.

The number of threatened forest species has continued to rise during the RFAs, with iconic species like koalas and [gliders](#) now either absent or experiencing population crashes in many parts of NSW. Logging is identified as a key threat to many forest species, often because of the impact logging has on key habitat features like [hollow-bearing trees](#).

Climate change was not considered as part of the RFAs, but is now the largest social, economic and environmental challenge we face. It is reckless to continue logging when we know it [reduces carbon stores of forests](#).

The RFAs removed public oversight of logging by excluding ‘third parties’ from taking legal action on logging breaches. This has resulted in a lack of accountability and transparency in their implementation and has favoured industry over the public interest.

### **Comments on jobs and the economy**

The NSW taxpayer has paid millions of dollars to a multi-national corporation to [buy-back](#) non-existent timber because of over-estimated timber volumes by Forestry Corporation. This is one of a series of subsidies that the logging industry receives.

The logging industry is one of the most mechanised and most dangerous. The number of direct jobs in the industry has steadily declined and is now [estimated as under 400](#) across NSW.

### **Comments on the consultation process**

The NSW Government has already committed to extending the RFAs. This commitment was made prior to the review that is now being conducted, so this consultation cannot be regarded as genuine. The review should be collating evidence to assess the performance of the RFAs with a view to making an evidence-based decision assessing whether they are an appropriate model for forest management.

The consultation process is entirely inadequate as the outcome appears to be predetermined. The RFAs affect two million hectares of public property in NSW, and very few people under the age of 30 are likely to have heard of RFAs. A concerted effort must be made to have genuine community consultation on the future of public native forests.

The reviews are so late as to make them meaningless. The entire rationale of the reviews – that the community can have confidence in the RFAs because of a transparent and timely review – has been seriously undermined.

In order to be effective, the independent reviewer must consult independent scientists (not just government agencies) and must undertake on-ground inspections of logging impacts with community groups.