



Abolish Failed Forest Deals

Regional Forest Agreements Should End When They Expire If Not Before

May 2016

For nearly 20 years native forest logging in Victoria, Tasmania, NSW and WA has received special treatment under commonwealth environmental laws. Other industries need approval from the commonwealth Environment Minister before taking an action that may affect threatened species or World Heritage. Native forest logging does not. The result has been catastrophic for wildlife and other forest values.

The environmental exemption for native forest logging is governed by Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs). These 20-year contracts, like the Coalition's stalled 'one stop shop' plan, hand state governments the power to make environmental decisions about native forest logging. Numerous assessments show how comprehensively they have failed.

RFAs start expiring from 3 February 2017 (East Gippsland) followed by Tasmania, other Victorian RFAs, WA and NSW. Special treatment for native forest logging should end. RFAs should be abolished forthwith or at the latest when they expire.

The groups endorsing this statement will not accept extension, roll-over or renewal of Regional Forest Agreements. Any future proposal to log public native forests should be subject to commonwealth environmental laws in the same way as for all other industries.

Signatories



Swift Parrot
(*Lathamus discolor*)



Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo
(*Calyptorhynchus banksii naso*)



GREEN SHAREHOLDERS



and —

- Byrangery Grass Reserve Trust
- Goonengerry Landcare Group
- Goongerah Environment Centre

Regional Forest Agreements are a comprehensive failure

Ten Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) were signed between 1997 and 2001 covering about 6.8 million hectares of native forests in Victoria, Tasmania, NSW and WA. These forests are home to an array of species found nowhere else and are vital for water, climate protection and recreation. Numerous assessments show that RFAs have manifestly failed to protect wildlife and threatened species or other values.

The domestic wood products industry meanwhile has shifted almost entirely to plantations as have export woodchip markets. The residual native forest logging industry continues to be rife with conflict as recent arrests in Tasmania and WA and serial court cases in East Gippsland attest.

Importantly the preferential treatment given to state government forestry agencies under the RFA regime has blocked opportunities for growth and innovation in competing forest industries like carbon, tourism and water. By effectively handing logging rights to the forestry industry, the RFA and surrounding policies have created a major obstacle to realising the value of forests for carbon storage and climate protection. Water availability and quality is degraded. Tourism is unable to compete as so called 'amenity values' are not meaningfully considered in state logging planning even in places that are recognised tourist attractions. Regional development proposals such as for new ecologically appropriate tourism are put through impossible planning hurdles, stalled until investors lose interest, and in some cases need approval by the logging agency itself — which inevitably gets blocked as it is a competitor for use of the resource.

While the RFAs have given the logging industry unparalleled access to native forests, opportunities to create new jobs and businesses in regional areas have languished as the publicly owned native forest asset is liquidated for logs.

RFAs are an economic as well as an environmental disaster. They cannot credibly be extended on the basis of environmental assessments dating back to the 1990s nor can they accredit state government processes that have demonstrably failed.

Native forest logging on public land should end. If any native forest logging is proposed in the future it should be subject to commonwealth environmental laws in the same way as every other industry, not exempted through the RFA regime.



Goanna (*Varanus varius*)

Evidence of failure

If a tree falls: compliance failures in the public forests of New South Wales (2011)

Community audits have revealed a pattern of systemic non-compliance with environmental laws in our public native forests

One Stop Chop: how Regional Forest Agreements streamline environmental destruction (2013)

Biodiversity protection in native forests is weaker than if logging was regulated directly under commonwealth environmental laws

State Forests, National Interests: a review of the Tasmanian RFA (2015)

Tasmania's forest management framework lacks environmental integrity and transparency. The RFA exemption should be removed

Lindenmeyer et al Ignoring the science in failing to conserve a faunal icon (2015)

Government policies that result in clearfelling of montane ash forests run counter to the large body of science indicating what is needed to conserve Leadbeater's possum, recently upgraded from 'endangered' to 'critically endangered'

Cherry Tree State Forest NSW - logging audit (2015)

Damning audit shows multiple breaches of recovery plans, licences and harvesting plans, including 41 breaches of Threatened Species Licence

Ticked off: how karri forest logging threatens wildlife and the credibility of the FSC standard (2015)

Karri logging is contributing to the decline of listed threatened species including the Western Ringtail Possum, Quokka, Woylie, Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and Baudin's Cockatoo

Regional Forest Agreements in NSW. Have they achieved their aims? (2016)

A review of the evidence concludes that RFAs have not achieved any of their top line aims. They are a failed model for forest management.

Box 2. Regional Forest Agreement Expiry Dates

East Gippsland	Vic	3 February 2017
Tasmania	Tas	8 November 2017
Central Highlands	Vic	27 March 2018
WA	WA	4 May 2019
North East	Vic	23 August 2019
Eden	NSW	26 August 2019
Gippsland	Vic	31 March 2020
Western	Vic	31 March 2020
North East	NSW	31 March 2020
Southern	NSW	24 April 2021

References

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Pugh, D. (2015) *Audit of Cherry Tree State Forest Compartments 359, 360 & 361*. North East Forest Alliance
Beckerling, J. (2015) *Ticked off -- how Karri Forest logging threatens wildlife and the credibility of the FSC Standard*. WA Forest Alliance, Australian Conservation Foundation, Wilderness Society
Sweeney, O.F. (2016) *Regional Forest Agreements in NSW: have they achieved their aims?* The National Parks Association of NSW Inc, Sydney

Photo credits

South Brooman State Forest, NSW Rob Blakers
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Goanna (*Varanus varius*) Judith Deland
Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) Steve Kuitert



Leadbeater's Possum
(*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*)