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RFA Review - via email: rfa.review@delwp.vic.gov.au

SUBMISSION

EEG's comments on the plan to renew the management of public forests under an extremely controversial and flawed deal are below:

It is 2018 and the old RFAs are startlingly obsolete. They must be abandoned.

The RFAs have failed environmentally, socially and economically since day one.

There were about 22 mills operating in East Gippsland in 1997. Now there are about five.

4297 #S 400 jobs claim in \$150m forest deal

By CLINTON
PORTEOUS and
LANNIE BARNES

MORE than 400 jobs and an extra \$150 million is set to flow from an historic forest agreement signed between Victoria and Canberra yesterday.

Describing the East Gippsland deal as a "trailblazer", Prime Minister John Howard said it would lay the foundation for the long-term future of the logging industry.

Timber industry leaders and Orbost locals celebrated the deal, but environmental groups warned it was the start of a new era of destruction and more woodchipping.

The East Gippsland Forest Agreement was sealed in Melbourne after

WHAT THE AGREEMENT MEANS

FOR LOGGERS:

More than 400 Victorian jobs. Investment expected to exceed \$150 million. A 20-year blueprint for East Gippsland logging instead of annual negotiations. The likelihood of another 10 similar agreements.

FOR GREENIES:

An extra 13,900ha, or 2 per cent, added to the East Gippsland reserve system. Five-yearly reviews of the agreement. Protection of rainforests and protection of reproduction areas for rare plants and animals.

more than than four years of negotiation and is expected to be the first of 11 similar deals nationally.

The Gippsland agreement covers 1.2 million hectares, setting out areas where logging and other forest activity is permitted, restricted or banned for the next 20 years.

Mr Howard said it would give certainty to the timber industry, allowing new investment

and job creation, while preserving precious animals and plant species.

"I would say to the other states, this is a trailblazer, this is a model and I would hope it will be copied all over Australia," Mr Howard said.

"It is a win for jobs in regional Australia. It will generate investment of \$150 million in the industry and will create 400 additional jobs at least."

Premier Jeff Kennett said at the signing it would help create jobs and investment by delivering certainty, which had been lacking, in the timber industry.

Green groups and opposition parties united in condemning the deal saying it was scientifically flawed and could lead to the destruction of species such as quolls, potoroos and owls.

Wilderness Society spokeswoman Virginia Young said the reserved areas could be changed at the stroke of a pen and might not even protect key breeding areas.

"How many species have to become extinct to get a few more jobs," she said.

Opposition environment spokeswoman Carmen Lawrence said it could also threaten tourism.

Activists arrested

FOURTEEN anti-logging protesters have been arrested and two are in jail refusing bail conditions after a protest at a stretch of rainforest in western Victoria.

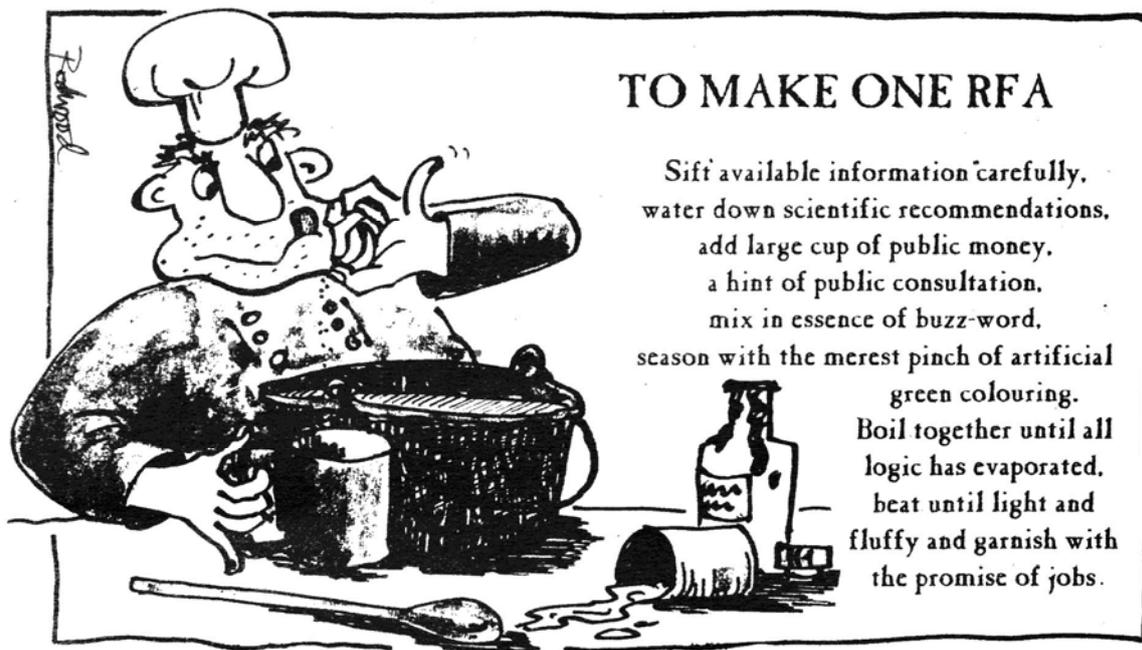
The Otway Ranges Environment Network said more activists would probably be jailed tomorrow when they would continue the obstruction of logging machines.

Spokesman for the group, David Butt, said that a second offence of obstruction would mean forcible removal.

Mr Butt said 12 of the 14 arrested were fined and released yesterday while one of those jailed had been arrested for the second time. - AAP

Governments of all political colours have historically and unfailingly been dictated to by the demands of the native forest logging industry and an over-commitment to the now Japanese-owned and ailing Maryvale Paper mill. This is also a major political donor and a stronghold of union members. We cannot overlook this central political influence in decisions that have been made. These favour logging forests for private profit over protection of forests for the public benefit. The RFAs have been a large part of this. The environmental impacts are immense and often irreparable, the jobs created are insignificant, the subsidies are enormous and unjustifiable, and the climate impacts irreversible and unforgiveable.

EEG has written extensively detailing the various breaches of this agreement. We could do so again here. However we have lost any hope that government decision making is not based on facts, science, what's right and wrong or what is best for the greatest number of people. We have almost no faith that public consultation is anything more than a process that must be gone through in order to legitimise the pre-determined outcome.



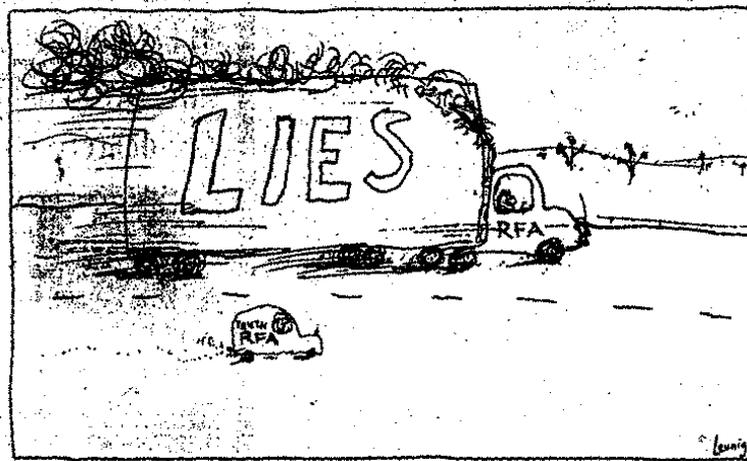
A short selection of failures is listed below:

1. **Around 3 million hectares of forests have been burnt in wildfires since the early 2000s.** This has seen an orgy of salvage logging over and above any façade of sustainability in the ash forests.

Fires were astoundingly not considered in the initial assessments despite many submissions highlighting this oversight. Apparently fires have never

been considered when yield revisions are carried out. Bushfires will become more frequent and severe yet 'sustainable yield' levels are calculated on the myth of no fires reducing both the industry's access and the conservation values claimed to need protecting. Bushfires will occur again. There is not the slightest 'wiggle room' being offered when volumes are determined.

2. **For years the state government allowed logging to occur in breach of its own laws, guidelines, code and management plans.** This was made clear in the brown Mountain case, EEG vs VicForests. If our group had not taken Supreme Court action, logging would have proceeded to destroy the habitat of several species of threatened wildlife. This was in 2009 and the court ordered that survey be carried out before logging. So for 12 years, logging had been carried out in total disregard of the very likely presence of protected species and in breach of the agreement. It is still carried out in a totally inadequate and minimalist way.
3. **The Greater Glider has declined by 80%** over the period of the East Gippsland RFA, demonstrating that any claims of the RFA '*preserving precious animal and plant species*' being an absurdity.



4. **In RFA areas across the country there are 537 threatened species currently listed under the EPBC Act. Over half are likely to occur within Regional Forest Agreement areas** (questions on notice, Budget Estimates, 22 May 2017).

This means there are around 300 forest dependent threatened species in areas planned for logging. Currently their status is unknown due to lack of resources and the political will to survey and research their status.

5. **The Leadbeater's Possum's population has crashed by two thirds in past 20 years as well.** This is a second species that we *do* know about. And

these are just the species which have been monitored. Hundreds more forest dependent plants and animals have not been monitored at all. The governments breached this critically important part of the agreement to survey and research to ensure forests were being logged 'sustainably'.

6. **Since the RFA was signed the** mountain ash forest was listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List of Ecosystems. It is of course the favoured tree to process into woodchips and paper.
7. **Gippsland Tourism was ignored. It could generate far more long term non-controversial jobs.** It is mostly nature based.

Currently Gippsland tourism provides 12,400 jobs. The Gippsland Visitor Economy generates an estimated \$1.2 Billion in Gross Regional Product (11% of the total Gippsland economy). The jobs equate to 12% of all Gippsland employment in over 3,000 businesses across every community in Gippsland.

These industries are far more sustainable and with huge growth potential yet subsidies and legal exemptions flow to the poorest performer, which is creating the most significant damage to the landscape, water catchments and climate while providing minimal and *declining* employment and in fact, impacting on other businesses and users of public land such as apiarists and the tourism industry.

8. **Ignores the previous review recommendations** and many of the original agreement points relating to establishing sustainability indicators, carrying out research into ecological impacts of logging and other environmental concerns. No credible reasons have been given for the abandonment of so many obligations within the 1997 agreement. Recommendations relating to improved threatened species outcomes, from the previous RFA five-yearly review in 2009 have still not been complied with.
See Attachment 1 for the details.
9. **Western Regional Forest Agreement.** The 2010 independent review recommended that the western RFA be ended. Yet VicForests is still planning extremely damaging logging plans for remnant woodlands across western Victoria. These support the very species which we are told are protected under an RFA.



Given the unarguable evidence of the RFA's total failure, EEG requests:

- Ending the government's indulgent treatment of this unpopular, costly and destructive industry via the RFA and all other favoured deals and exemptions.
- Transition to plantations rapidly as recommended in the recent enquiry into VicForests.
- Decommission VicForests.
- If any other form of forest management is created its remit must focus on forest values being primarily for water, carbon, tourism, habitat and conservation.
- Management prescriptions for rare and threatened native plants and animals must be strengthened in line with community and global expectations.
- Cease clearfelling.
- Cease logging all high conservation value forests while an assessment of which areas need to be added into the reserve system to help link, buffer and restore large areas of forest.
- Do not recycle old logging industry personalities to head up a 'new look' section or entity that employs as many spin doctors as bureaucrats.

The looming expiration of the RFAs provides a once-in-two-decades opportunity to put in place improved, modern and transparent arrangements for management of Victoria's publicly owned native state forests. In 2018 this should now be based on current science, climate concerns and on wider community views about how our state forests should be valued, used and managed.

This overdue five-yearly review ought to recommend the RFAs be abandoned and a transition plan put in place to move out of the antiquated and heavily subsidised – and despised - business of clearfelling and logging native forests.

The AP mill at Maryvale (makers of Reflex paper) has been a favoured political donor with considerable influence. Decades ago it was granted long-term access to the beautiful Mountain Ash forests of the Central Highlands with their contract for Mountain Ash logs secure until 2030. They are VicForests biggest customer alongside ASH.

But even with all the millions this paper mill receives as 'industry assistance', various other handouts and dirt cheap quality logs, it still hasn't made a profit for years. It is up against cheap imported paper, a boycott campaign and increasing demand for certified forest-friendly paper by customers. Its owner Nippon Paper in Japan, has been considering the mill's viability for some time.

The industry has logged itself into a terminal mess and governments have happily allowed this.

There are many strong arguments as to why the RFA must now be considered a relic and terminated.



ATTACHMENT 1.

Examples of dumped agreement obligations under the East Gippsland RFA signed 3.2.97

Point 1.

Parties are committed to ensuring the Agreement is durable and that the obligations and commitments ...*ensure effective conservation*, forest management and forest industry outcomes.

Point 6.

Parties confirm their commitment ... to the Nat Forest Policy Statement by: (among others)

* *developing and implementing Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM)*

Point 15.

The Commonwealth notes that its *obligations to promote endangered species protection* will involve ongoing cooperative work with Victorian agencies concerning East Gippsland.

Under **Monitoring, Reporting and Consultative Mechanisms**

Point 25.

This agreement establishes milestones (Attachment 3) and *parties will report annually on their achievement* using an appropriate public reporting mechanism.

Point 26.

Victoria will report on the results of monitoring of sustainability indicators.

Point 29.

Victoria will further *develop the transparency and accountability of its forest management process through the implementation of an ongoing quality assurance program. The program will be implemented, within three years, utilising expertise external to the forest agency in the DNRE or its equivalent.*

Under **Five Yearly Reviews**

Point 30.

Every five years, a review of the performance of the Agreement will be undertaken. ... to provide an assessment of progress...against established milestones, and will include:

- *the extent to which milestones and obligations have been met including management of the National Estate*
- *the results of monitoring of sustainability indicators; and*
- *invited public comment on the performance of the Agreement*

Under **ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT**

Accreditation

Point 35.

Parties agree that Victoria's forest management systems... *provide for continuing improvement in relation to ESFM.*

Sustainability indicators

Point 37.

Parties agree that the current forest management systems could be enhanced by further developing appropriate mechanisms to *monitor and review the sustainability of forest management practices.* To ensure that this occurs, parties agree to *establish an appropriate set of sustainability indicators to monitor forest changes.* Any indicators established will be consistent with the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators (attachment 8) and they will be practical, measurable, cost-effective and capable of being implemented at the regional level.

Point 38.

Parties will assess the outcomes of the Montreal Process Implementation Group (MIG) process by the end of 1997. After considering the extent to which the process provides ... relevant indicators, the process to be used in developing indicators for application in East Gippsland will be determined. Any process adopted will provide for appropriate public consultation and determine the frequency of reporting.

Point 39. Says that it will *consider the results of a timber research development corp pilot study before developing sustainability indicators.*

Point 66. Says *the Feds will consider financial assistance to develop sustainability indicators and work on endangered species.*

Despite millions having been handed to the logging industry over this time, funding and resources for environmental research and monitoring has been cut to the bone. Letters were written asking why these agreement points had not been carried out. The State response was that they were waiting for federal government funds. The federal government's response was that they were refusing to share the costs as they were annoyed with state for reducing licence volumes. And yet the public is expected to believe any RFA renewal will look after our degrading forest environment and its wildlife.