Western Victorian Forest Protection Network

PO Box 428, DAYLESFORD, VIC. 3460

- **Wombat Forest Society**
- **The Otways Ranges Environment Network**
- **Portland Field Naturalists**
- **Hamilton Field Naturalists**
- **Geelong Community Forum**
- **ANGAIR**
- **Friends of [redacted]**
- **Actively Conserving Trentham**
- **Dhuart Wurrong Elders Corporation**
- **Victorian Apiarists Association**
- **South Western Environment Action Group**
- **Daylesford Walking Group**
- **Friends of the Lerderderg**
- **Enfield Forest Alliance**
- **Apollo Bay Landcare Group**
- **Friends of the Grampians**

5 October 1999.

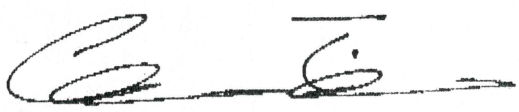
Dear Sir/Madam,

The above member groups of the Western Victorian Forest Protection Network, involved in the consultative process to develop a Regional Forest Agreement for the Western Region of Victoria, are writing to you to express major, ongoing concerns about the RFA process and to outline the changes to it that are necessary in order to achieve any form of agreement that will be acceptable to the wider community.

Two attachments to this letter state our major concerns and requirements. Our member groups have unanimously agreed that, if our demands cannot be met, our network will seriously consider withdrawing from the process.

We look forward to the opportunity to meet with you as a matter of urgency. Mr. Peter O'Mara, Community Liaison Officer for our network, can be contacted on 53 481154 to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,



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For and on behalf of the
Western Victorian Forest Protection Network
C. J. TIPLER

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For and on behalf of the
Western Victorian Forest Protection Network
T. C. ANDERSON

The Consultative Process

- The DNRE and Federal Forest Taskforce have failed to provide adequate dialogue opportunities for the WVFPN member groups, local community and non-timber stakeholders. This is a serious concern to the network given our substantially shortened RFA process to meet woodchip demands. The Wombat Forest Society's RFA funded local meetings, collectively attended by 500 people, had only representation (Ian Miles) by either Department on only one occasion;

- Deliberate exclusion of Geelong, the region's largest population centre, from the RFA process. The City of Geelong has a vital interest in forest management and related issues due to the importance of the Otway State Forest in maintaining tourism and water values;

- A complete lack of community consultative strategy and planning including the failure to adequately inform important stakeholders in the RFA process including local councils (City of Greater Geelong) and water authorities (South West Water);

- Inadequate CRA report meeting infrastructure and sophistication, such as an independent chairperson, meeting agendas and secretarial provision;

- Reluctance by DNRE and the Forest Taskforce to provide requested reference material and data breakdowns;

- Defensive and often evasive responses to community and stakeholder concerns during CRA meetings;

- Shallow and unrepresentative analysis of significant local communities within the CRA report due to a failure to adequately locate important community stakeholders;

- Failure of DNRE/Forest Taskforce to meet any process timetable;

- Lack of proactive dialogue from both DNRE and Forest Taskforce regarding delayed timetabling;

- Inadequate RFA community facilitator to provide input, policy, process and outcome liaison.

ATTACHMENT 1.

Western Victorian Forest Protection Network

Statement of Concerns Relating to the Current Regional Forest Agreement Process for Western Victoria

The Network's concerns about the current process fall under three headings:

Substance and Content of the Process

- The definition of the Western Region as one entity is preventing the process from properly analysing the important differences that exist between the several Forest Management Areas in the region, which imply the need for a range of policy prescriptions. Continuing on the current track will lead to "lowest common denominator" outcomes that will serve no one.

- The research that has been completed by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments as a foundation for community consultation and policy formulation is completely inadequate. The Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA), part of which was released in July, completely lacks vision and is essentially a compendium of disconnected facts and DNRE "dogma". The CRA fails to give adequate consideration to forest values other than timber, does not explore the linkages and trade offs between the various forest values, and contains many factual errors. In addition, vitally important research on flora and fauna in the region has yet to be completed and publicised.

- The CRA presents an inaccurate, biased assessment of the current forest management regime in the Western Region and fails to incorporate information communicated to the DNRE and the Taskforce on numerous occasions relating to forest management practices.

Management of the RFA Process

- The RFA process is clearly being driven by the Forestry Division of the DNRE, which has also provided four of the nine members of the Steering Committee. Our specific concerns here are:

    - The Forestry Division of the DNRE is very closely aligned to timber interests (evidenced by the fact that, in the CRA document, DNRE staff numbers were included in the timber industry employment data);

    - Driven by woodchipping, the active destruction of biodiverse native forest is continuing throughout the Western Region under DNRE stewardship;

    - The DNRE acts generally as if it is a law unto itself, often withholding information on its activities and dismissing or ignoring any community input or criticism. In particular, DNRE officers have revealed an evasive and defensive attitude at RFA process meetings and have displayed little genuine interest forest values other than timber.

ATTACHMENT 2.

Western Victorian Forest Protection Network

Statement of Demands Relating to the Current Regional Forest Agreement Process for Western Victoria

The Network's stated concerns imply the need for major changes to the RFA process, as follows:

- The process needs to be extended by one year (to 31/12/2000) to enable adequate research to be completed and full community consultation to occur.

- The new research programme must include a comprehensive adequate and up to date assessment of non-timber values, including water, tourism, biodiversity, plantations and other non-destructive activities such as bee-keeping and recreational fishing. This research must be carried out by suitably qualified, independent authorities and it must fully explore the impact of logging on non-timber values.

- The DNRE must be excluded from management of the process. To this end, we recommend the formation of an independent committee consisting largely of qualified representatives from local communities in the Western Region. This committee would oversee the research and consultative programme.

- To protect the region's native forests from further destruction in the intervening period, three initiatives are necessary:

    1. An immediate moratorium on logging in all proclaimed water catchments in the Western Region;

    2. An immediate review of royalties on all native forest produce (including Residual logs), to be concluded and implemented by 31 January 2000, with the objective of setting prices in a manner which is consistent with National Competition Policy. This review should be conducted by an independent organisation and must involve comprehensive consultation with the community.

    3. An extension of existing interim forest agreements and FMA guidelines to protect additional forest areas that are recognised, within the extended RFA process, to have high non-timber values.